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THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF LAUGHTER

Works By Boris Sidis

The Psychology of Laughter

The Psychology of Suggestion

Multiple Personality

Psychopathological Researches

Sleep

Philistine and Genius

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LAUGHTER

BY

BORIS SIDIS, M.A., PH.D., M.D.



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TO MY LOYAL FRIENDS
G. S. W. AND P. W. W.
IN TOKEN OF ESTEEM
AND DEVOTION

PREFACE

An inquiry into the main psychological principles that underlie laughter and its various manifestations presents a number of difficulties. There is a wide range of the ludicrous, beginning with the nursery rhymes of Mother Goose, the coarse sallies of the clown, the zany, the cartoonist, the mimic, and the joker, and ending with the classical productions of Aristophanes, Lucian, Juvenal, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Molière, Voltaire, Gogol, Thackeray and Dickens. The great Russian writer, Gogol, in his famous work "Dead Souls," lays special stress on the fact that a whole abyss separates the productions of elevated laughter from the contortions of the buffoon and the clown. No doubt Gogol is right: there is an abyss between the crude art of the buffoon and the "pearl of creative art" produced by the genius of comedy. Still the abyss can be bridged over. May we not similarly say that a whole abyss separates the crude idols of the stone age from the beautiful statues of a Phidias? The two extremes are, nevertheless, connected by a long series of intermediate steps. The abyss, however, as Gogol points out, is present. The difficulty is to bridge over the extremes and find the fundamental principles that underlie the almost infinite diversity of the manifestations of the ludicrous.

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Another difficulty lies in the fact that very little satisfactory and systematic work has been done in the domain of the psychology of laughter and the ludicrous. Theories have been advanced since the time of Aristotle, but they have been fragmentary and abstract. Extensive and important as the domain of the ludicrous is in the life of mankind, the scientific investigator devotes but little time and space to this side of human activity. This may be partly due to the fact that the comic is regarded as superficial and trivial, or as dealing at best with the commonplace of life, possibly below the dignity of the scientific inquirer. Even a man like Bergson excludes comedy from the high sphere of art. He tells us that the nature of comedy is opposed to tragedy, drama, and other forms of art. According to Bergson, the sole object of true art is the individual; not so comedy, which deals with the general, the typical. Art deals with individual things as they really are; while comedy, like life, is concerned with general characters, with types. Comedy is prosaic. In other words, comedy does not belong to the sphere of art. In spite of his remarkable acumen, Bergson is entirely wrong in his generalization. Both tragedy and comedy deal with types.

Moreover, according to Bergson, we should have to exclude from the domain of art the comedies of Aristophanes, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Molière's dramatic works, Shakespeare's comic dramas, the humorous works of Dickens, Thackeray and Gogol. This will not

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do. We must agree with Gogol that the great artist or poet in his creations of laughter and the ludicrous may produce and has produced "pearls of creation," even if such pearls have been cast away on contemporary readers. One cannot help agreeing with the apparently paradoxical statement of Plato in his "Symposium" that tragedy and comedy are intimately related, that the great dramatic poet can wield with equal force the incidents and types of tragedy and comedy. This is well exemplified in the dramatic works of Shakespeare. The extreme and fallacious view held by Bergson well illustrates the confused and chaotic state of the subject of the ludicrous.

Still another difficulty lies in the disorganized and scattered condition of the material referring to laughter and the ludicrous. The material is rich, but this wealth makes the choice all the more difficult. To this should be added the fact that the material is so scattered that the labor of selection and sifting is arduous and appears almost insurmountable. I had to choose my examples of the ludicrous from the literature of various nations and different ages. It was difficult to decide as to the preference given to the selected material. Of course, it is desirable to give illustrations and make the analysis of examples from recent works, as they are more comprehensible to the reader. This was done as much as the scope of the work as well as circumstances permitted.

In selecting my material for analysis from English and American writers I wished to utilize some illustra-

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tions from Bret Harte and Mark Twain. All citations, however, from these two American writers had to be dispensed with, because their publishers' permission could not be obtained.

I trust the reader will form some notion of the difficulties with which I had to contend in this work. At the same time he will be ready to accept my apology for not using quotations from two popular American writers.

BORIS SIDIS,
Sidis Psychotherapeutic Institute,
Portsmouth,
New Hampshire.

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LAUGHTER

CHAPTER I

LAUGHTER

The cause and nature of laughter have been examined by many thinkers, each one contributing his mite to the analysis of this highly complex phenomenon. What is laughter? What is its source? Whence flow those rich manifestations of wit, the comic, the joke, the jest, irony, sarcasm, that, like ethereal light, keep on playing on the surface of human life? What are the constituents, what is the mechanism of an event, of a phrase, of a comedy, that awaken in us a smile, or make our chest and limbs shake and heave with laughter?

The particular essence which we discover in the funny and in the ridiculous is hard to analyze; it is as elusive as the delicate perfume of the rose and the violet. Many highly intelligent people when they are asked on the spur of the moment what it is specially that they find funny in a joke, in a comedy, or in a particular situation at which they laugh heartily, are unable to tell the special points that awaken in them merriment and laughter. They know it is funny; it is ridiculous. The ridiculous appears to exhale an essence which men directly perceive without being able to analyze the constituents. In fact, there are intellectual people who think

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that the fun of the joke is gone when touched by the scalpel of analysis. The comic is evidently something living, and, like the living, cannot be dissected without giving rise to symptoms of decay and death. The comic, like the beautiful, is to be enjoyed directly, intuitively, without analysis, without criticism. There is a unity, a living unity, which is directly perceived by the mind and reacted to by the living human organism. The analysis, the dissection of the constituent elements, means the killing, the death of the living unity of the comic.

Still the difficulties may not be insurmountable, after all. We study the human body and its functions by means of anatomical investigations as well as physiological researches. We study the functions of the mind by means of physiological and psychopathological work, both experimental and observational. Why not do the same in the case of laughter? We can obtain the constituents by means of analysis, and their functions by means of psychological and psychopathological study of the facts. In this way we may be able to find some of the important elements that go to make up the nature of the comic.

It may be well to look for the general aspect of what we regard as ridiculous, funny, and amusing. Perhaps the psychological side may be more accessible and help us in the investigation of the subject. In the first place, all the different manifestations of the comic, the witty, and the ridiculous belong psychologically to that particular emotional side of our being which we class under joy. Whatever is joyful awakens in us, if not intense laughter, at least a smile, however flitting. We may observe it in undeveloped characters, or in people who lack self-control. Anything which awakens in them

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the emotion of joy also arouses in them smiles and laughter; in many the laughter is almost uncontrollable. This is manifested in young people, and especially children.

Play that arouses the emotion of joy gives rise to smiles and laughter. Observe girls and boys, or children when in full active play: you will always find that along with the play there goes the manifestation of laughter. There may not be anything specially funny and comic, and still the laughter is often uncontrollable. Listen to the noisy laughter of schoolboys and schoolgirls at play, especially after they have been released from their lessons at school. The mirth and laughter of an audience at a comic play or in listening to the funny remarks of a favorite orator remind one of the play of unrestrained schoolboys and girls. We may, therefore, lay down the law that *all unrestrained spontaneous activities of normal functions give rise to the emotion of joy with its expression of smiles and laughter*. If we remember that play is the manifestation of spontaneous, unrestrained activity we can begin to understand the nature of laughter, which is one of the manifestations of the play instinct present, not only in man, but in the whole animal world. We observe this play instinct in puppies, in kittens and, in fact, in all young animals.

If we inspect this play activity more closely, we find that it belongs to the type of artistic activities. The word play is used for dramatic work and for ordinary play activities of animal life. Instrumental music, dancing, singing, dramatic plays, and all forms of æsthetic and artistic activities, as well as games, combats and contests, all belong to the same general root of the play instinct. We may possibly add that even the religious

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activities of man belong to the same class of human life activities, activities which have their root in the play instinct present alike in the kitten, puppy, squirrel and bird. Among the modern savages, ancient nations, the Greeks, the Israelites, we find alike that all those artistic activities and play are intimately interrelated—the artistic activities having their source in the play instinct. In the Olympic games of the Greeks, the gladiatorial combats of the Romans, the religious psalms and songs of the Hebrews, the dances and poetry of the Australians, the Andamanese, the Bushmen, the Esquimaux, the religious temple performances of the Middle Ages, of the Hindoo dancing girls, the wild ecstatic whirling and dancing of the dervishes, as well as in the singing and praising of the Lord in the modern church services, we can see the connection of art, play, religion, and games.

Football and church hymns are apparently disconnected, and still they are intimately related. They are offshoots of the same parent root, the play instinct. The minister may war on Sunday play and games on holidays, but he must know that the church service, however sacred and solemn, is the outcome of the game impulse and the satisfaction of the play instinct inherent in the animal, child, and adult. The football player, the actor, and the priest are brothers of the same mother—the play impulse; servitors of the same instinct—the play instinct. Church services, religious ceremonies, theatrical plays, dancing balls, football and baseball games are intimately related; they are so many offshoots of the same parent stem. In all the processes of metamorphosis through which they have passed in the course of ages they still at bottom keep on subserving the same function—the satisfaction of the animal play instinct of man.

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Laughter, smiling, and grinning are the external manifestations of the play instinct. Laughter may be sublimated into a barely perceptible smile; the smile in its turn may become sublimated into a grin or an expression of satisfaction, or contentment, or the inner emotion of joy which accompanies the activity of the play instinct. Whatever gives us joy makes us laugh, or gives rise to an expression akin to laughter and smiles. A number of objects may give rise to the emotion of joy with its concomitant motor manifestations of smiles and laughter. What is common to all these objects is the fact that they all belong to the class of playthings. This we can easily observe in the case of little children who laugh and jump with joy when they keep on playing with their toys. Adult life is not in any way different: adults laugh and are amused with their toys, but the toys are more disguised and far more complex. We must have our toys and our playthings to amuse us and to make us laugh. The character of the toys, however, changes with the nation, age, and environment. The character of the plaything also changes with the age of the individual. In spite, however, of all the various changes the plaything undergoes, it must still preserve its nature of a plaything. *We laugh in play.* The play instinct must remain dominant.

A few passages from the great biologist, Darwin, may be to the point:

"Joy, when intense, leads to various purposeless movements—to dancing about, clapping the hands, stamping, etc., and to loud laughter. Laughter seems primarily to be the expression of mere joy or happiness. . . . A man smiles—and smiling, as we shall see, graduates into laughter—at meeting an old friend in the

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street, as he does at any trifling pleasure, such as smelling a sweet perfume. Laura Bridgman, from her blindness and deafness, could not have acquired any expression through imitation, yet when a letter from a beloved friend was communicated to her by gesture-language she 'laughed and clapped her hands, and the color mounted to her cheeks.' On other occasions she has been seen to stamp for joy.

"Idiots and imbecile persons likewise afford good evidence that laughter or smiling primarily expresses mere happiness or joy. . . . There is a large class of idiots who are persistently joyous and benign, and who are constantly laughing or smiling. Their countenances often exhibit a stereotyped smile; their joyousness is increased, and they grin, chuckle, or giggle whenever food is placed before them, or when they are caressed, are shown bright colors, or hear music. Some of them laugh more than usual when they walk about or attempt any muscular exertion. The joyousness of most of these idiots cannot possibly be associated, as Dr. Browne remarks, with any distinct ideas: they simply feel pleasure, and express it by laughter or smiles. With imbeciles rather higher in the scale personal vanity seems to be the commonest cause of laughter, and next to this pleasure arising from the approbation of their conduct.

"From the fact that a child can hardly tickle itself, or in a much less degree than when tickled by another person, it seems that the precise point to be touched must not be known; so with the mind, something unexpected—a novel or incongruous idea which breaks through an habitual train of thought—appears to be a strong element in the ludicrous.

"The sound of laughter is produced by a deep in-

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spiration followed by short, interrupted, spasmodic contractions of the chest, and especially of the diaphragm.

. . . From the shaking of the body the head nods to and fro. The lower jaw often quivers up and down, as is likewise the case with some species of baboons when they are much pleased.

"During laughter the mouth is opened more or less widely, with the corners drawn much backward; and the upper lip is somewhat raised. The drawing back of the corners is best seen in moderate laughter, and especially in a broad smile—the latter epithet showing how the mouth is widened.

"In laughing and broadly smiling the cheeks and upper lip are much raised, the nose appears to be shortened, and the skin on the bridge becomes finely wrinkled in transverse lines, with other oblique longitudinal lines on the sides. The upper front teeth are commonly exposed. A well-marked naso-labial fold is formed, which runs from the wing of each nostril to the corner of the mouth; and this fold is often double in old persons.

"A bright and sparkling eye is characteristic of a pleased or amused state of mind, as is the retraction of the corners of the mouth and upper lip with the wrinkles thus produced. Even the eyes of microcephalous idiots, who are so degraded that they never learn to speak, brighten slightly when they are pleased. . . . According to Dr. Piderit, who has discussed this point more fully than any other writer, the tenseness may be largely attributed to the eyeballs becoming filled with blood and other fluids, from the acceleration of the circulation, consequent on the excitement of pleasure."

"A man in high spirits, though he may not actually

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smile, commonly exhibits some tendency to the retraction of the corners of his mouth. From the excitement of pleasure the circulation becomes more rapid; the eyes are bright, and the color of the face rises. The brain, becoming stimulated by the increased flow of blood, reacts on the mental powers; lively ideas pass still more rapidly through the mind, and the affections are warmed. I heard a child, a little under four years old, when asked what was meant by being in good spirits, answer, 'It is laughing, talking and kissing.'

"Savages sometimes express their satisfaction, not only by smiling, but by gestures derived from the pleasure of eating. Thus Mr. Wedgwood quotes Petherick that the negroes on the Upper Nile began a general rubbing of their bellies when he displayed his beads; and Leichhardt says that the Australians smacked and clacked their mouths at the sight of his horses and bullocks, and more especially of his kangaroo dogs. The Greenlanders, 'when they affirm anything with pleasure, suck down air with a certain sound'; and this may be an imitation of the act of swallowing savory food.

"Laughter is frequently employed in a forced manner to conceal or mask some other state of mind, even anger. We often see persons laughing in order to conceal their shame or shyness. When a person purses up his mouth, as if to prevent the possibility of a smile, though there is nothing to excite one, or nothing to prevent its free indulgence, an affected, solemn, or pedantic expression is given; but of such hybrid expressions nothing more need here be said. In case of derision a real or pretended smile or laugh is often blended with the expression proper to contempt and this may pass into angry contempt or scorn. In such cases the meaning of the laugh or smile

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is to show the offending person that he excites only amusement."

All these quotations from Darwin's "The Expression of the Emotions" clearly indicate the intimate relation of joy, satisfaction, laughter, and smiles.

CHAPTER II

ART, RELIGION, AND CHILD GAMES

What changes does the play element undergo from the toys of the child to the jokes, jests, banterings, and comedy of the adult? In all of them we observe the artistic activity manifesting itself as free unrestrained energy. This, however, is too general a statement. We must go more into detail and find out what there is in the object of merriment that unloosens the pent-up energies resulting in the psychomotor activities of laughter. *The spent energy, as in all artistic activities, should be felt by the person who exercises it as not tending to any useful aim. The energy must be spent for its own sake: for the love of it.* The child in playing with its doll, the adult in playing his games, must feel that they are not for a certain purpose; but the purpose, as in all art, must be in the very activity itself. The painter in working on his picture, the sculptor in chiseling his statue, the novelist in working on his book, must feel the same love of the activity itself, irrespective of any ultimate gain. The activity itself must be its own purpose.

Even in the play instinct manifested as religion, the games, the songs, the hymns, the worship, the prayers, must be for some ultimate infinite aim outside the sordid cares of life; they must be for the love of the Infinite, for the love of God. "Love thy God with all thy heart" is the commandment of religion; in the highest form of

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religious worship it is love irrespective of all earthly gain. This statement appears irreverent, since it puts religion in the same category with plays and games. In the course of our exposition we shall realize the full meaning of this principle of the play instinct underlying man's artistic activity which has its root in the animal play instinct. We shall find that the play instinct is probably the most fundamental instinct of animal life—it gives rise to the highest activities characteristic of human life. The play instinct is one of the broadest, the deepest of human interests that work in man, giving rise to the highest artistic, moral, and intellectual life of which the human mind is capable.

“Out of the mouths of babes we may learn wisdom,” as the Bible puts it. Let us return to the little ones and attempt to scrutinize their simple plays and games. We may find in them some of the elements which enter as constituents in the laughter, wit, and the comic of the fully developed adult life. When the little girl plays with her dolls, or the boy plays his games, what we observe most casually is the fact that there is complete lack of consciousness of effort. The play is carried on with ease, with gracefulness. Even if there is any effort present it is only for the observer: the child that carries out the game has no consciousness of effort, there is not the least trace of irksomeness. *This lack of consciousness of effort and lack of irksomeness are found in the games of the adult*, although such games may to the external observer appear difficult. In this respect even severe games, like football or baseball, may be learned so as to have them executed with no consciousness of intense effort. This also holds true in the highly complex and difficult artistic works, such as music, painting, and

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sculpture. In fact, it may be said that this law holds true in the whole domain of play, with its joy and the consequent inner laughter.

In the work of the mathematician when he solves a difficult problem, in the work of the inventor, in the play of chess, as well as in other games, the more difficulties are overcome, the more the joy elements are present, the more we see bubbles of laughter rising to the surface of mental life. The great poet Sophocles makes *Electra* say of her mother *Clytemnestra* that she is "triumphantly laughing at what she has done." Similarly the poet in Job says: "Wilt thou give strength to the horse? Wilt thou clothe his neck with thunder? He will not be dismayed and he will laugh at fear." We may then formulate the following law: *If an act is carried out in a playful way, the more difficulties that playful act embodies, the more there is of inner joy; the more interesting and exciting the game, the more intense the psychomotor reactions, the more will the manifestations of merriment and laughter appear.* This is the secret of the intense allurements of games which are accompanied with danger.

Nations in which the intellectual and artistic sides are undeveloped look for their enjoyment, merriment, and laughter in gross and dangerous games. Witness the gladiatorial games of the ancient Romans, the bull fights of the Spaniards, and the football of the American populace. The whole fun of the game is danger overcome, made easy and playful.

Many hide this craving for games of danger, this ferocious element, under the guise of training. Such games, it is claimed, train the man. What such games really train is the brutal, animal play instinct. We may

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possibly formulate another related law: *The more material civilization becomes developed, and the craving for play grows, the greater is the demand of having the difficult and the impossible enacted with ease.* We demand more and more difficult feats of the clown, of the actor, of the prestidigitateur, of the racers, and of the prize fighters. The technique rises with civilization. What a country bumpkin regards with admiration and laughs at with great joy the city man regards with contempt. We demand of the circus man and the animals with which he plays at great danger of life more and more difficult feats executed with greater ease and grace. We may, therefore, finally express the law: *The lower the intellectual element in a given civilized community, the more will the dangerous elements predominate in their games.*

This may possibly fall under the Weber-Fechner law that while the sensations grow in an arithmetical progression the stimuli grow in a geometrical progression. However, whether the last law be true or not of the whole emotional life, our law remains true; namely, that enjoyment and its psychomotor manifestation, laughter, grow with the difficulties embodied in the act that gives rise to merriment and laughter. The ease with which the difficult or dangerous feat is carried out arouses joy with its accompanying smiles and laughter.

In his dance, in his jump, in his gambol, it is the ease with which the motions are executed that gives the child such joy, over which he delights in peals of laughter. In his choice of the ball the young child specially delights and laughs over the skips of the light ball that rebounds with ease. The balloon that skips and floats about he greets with merry laughter. The child will not choose

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anything clumsy, heavy, unwieldy, or irksome to handle: there is no fun in it. He wants the laughter of enjoyment of triumph. This *laughter of triumph runs through all the stages of life*. When we triumph over some difficulty after a period of long hard work, we laugh. We laugh, when news is brought to us which we hardly believe could have happened. The actor or singer cannot help laughing after a successful play; the grave professor smiles when he solves his problem; and the banker, speculator, and financier smile when their plans and schemes have been successfully carried out. The politician, the statesman has his grim smile after a successful campaign, and the general has his grin after a triumphant battle. This is the laughter of triumph.

And Miriam the prophetess took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath been thrown into the sea.

We have here the joy, song, and laughter of triumph.

CHAPTER III

THE LUDICROUS

We may now reverse the process. Suppose the child in playing with the ball sees one who does not know how to catch it; misses it every time; knocks himself against the ball without getting hold of it; slips, falls down, picks himself up and runs after the ball without being able to catch it. In short, the person is awkward, clumsy, finds difficulties where there are none. Friction appears where there should be smoothness; hardship is manifest where ease and grace are expected. The child laughs the laughter of triumph, not *with* the person, but *at* the person; from the height of his supposed efficiency or ideal of efficiency the child laughs the laughter of triumph at the deficiencies of the person—the person is ridiculed. Any supposed deficiency in appearance, in person, or in action is laughed at—is ridiculed. We are now in the domain of the comic. Children in school ridicule any clumsiness, awkwardness, or any personal deficiency; they make merry over the lame, the hunchback, the cross-eyed, the blind. For that matter, we find the same amusements among the uncultivated who make merry over the bodily defects of their neighbors and acquaintances.

Old Homer, when he wishes to ridicule *Thersites*, presents the ancient demagogue as:

. . . ill favored beyond all men that came to Ilios.
Bandy-legged was he, and lame of one foot, and his

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shoulders rounded, arched down over his chest; and over them his head was warped, and a scanty stubble sprouted on it.

Victor Hugo, in his "Notre Dame de Paris," represents the crowd bursting into a thunder of applause and shouts of convulsive, derisive laughter at the sight of the ugly, misshapen, one-eyed, bandy-legged, huge-headed, splay-footed, thick-nosed, horseshoe-mouthed, double-humped, deformed monster hunchback, *Quasimodo*.

When the great Russian writer, Gogol, wishes to ridicule the type he represents by *Sobakevitch* he makes the latter look defective, awkward, and clumsy.

Sobakevitch looked like a medium sized bear. To complete this resemblance his coat was the color of a bear's fur; his sleeves were long; his trousers were large; he was flat-footed, walked both awry and askew, and trod constantly upon the feet of other people. His face shone like a bright copper coin.

To present him as still clumsier and more deficient the great writer adds:

There are many faces over whose formation Nature did not pause long in thought, nor employ any delicate instruments, but simply hewed them at full sweep of her arm; she grasped her axe, a nose appeared; she grasped it again—the lips appeared; with a big auger she formed the eyes; and without planing it down, she loosed the figure in the world, saying: "Let it have life."

Even refined and cultivated people cannot suppress a smile when they hear one stammer. Thus Shakespeare in his "Merry Wives of Windsor" makes his characters ridiculous by representing *Sir Hugh Evans*, the parson,

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as defective in speech, and *Sir John Falstaff* as defective in bodily appearance. "Very goot," says *Evans*, "I will make a prief in my notebook." Of *Falstaff Mrs. Ford* says: "What tempest, I trow, threw this whale, with so many tons of oil in his belly, ashore at Windsor?" As *Sir Evans*, the parson, is awkward in his speech, so *Falstaff*, the fat man, is clumsy in his body. Both of them, on account of such clumsiness, are exposed by Shakespeare as objects of ridicule.

The following jokes about stammerers may illustrate our point:

A stutterer once asked one of the guards in a railway station: "How f-f-f-far is it t-t-t-t-to C-C-C-C-Cambridge?"

The guard did not answer.

The stutterer repeated his question; again the guard remained silent. The stutterer became angry and turned to the next guard, "I shall r-r-rep-p-p-port t-t-that m-m-m-man. I asked him h-h-how f-f-f-far it w-w-was t-t-t-to C-C-C-C-Cambridge and he r-r-r-ref-f-fused t-t-t-t-to answer."

The guard gave the information and then turned to the first silent guard and asked him why he did not give the required information.

"D-D-D-D-Do you t-t-t-think I want m-m-m-m-my b-b-b-b-b-blamed head kn-n-n-n-nocked off?"

A gentleman, stammering much in his speech, laid down a winning card; and then said to his partner, "How s-s-s-sa-ay you now, w-w-was not t-t-t-this c-c-c-c-card p-p-p-p-passing we-we-well l-l-l-laid?"

"Yes," says the other, "it was well laid, but it needs not half the cackling."

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I have found out a gig-gig-gift for my fuf-fuf-fair,
I have found out where the rattle-snakes bub-bub-breed;
Will you co-co-come, and I'll show you the bub-bub-bear,
And the lions and tit-tit-tigers at fuf-fuf-feed.

I know where the co-co-cockatoos's song
Makes mum-mum-melody through the sweet vale;
Where the mum-monkeys gig-gig-grin all the day long
Or gracefully swing by the tit-tit-tail.

You shall pip-play, dear, some did-did-delicate joke
With the bub-bub-bear on the tit-tit-top of his pip-pip-
pip-pole;
But observe, 'tis forbidden to pip-poke
At the bub-bub-bear with your pip-pip-pink pip-pip-pip-
pip-parasol!

You shall see the huge elephant pip-pip-play,
You shall gig-gig-gaze on the stit-stit-stately racoon;
And then did-dear, together we'll stray
To the cage of the bub-bub-blue-faced bab-bab-boon.

You wished (I r-r-remember it well,
And I lul-lul-loved you the m-m-more for the wish)
To witness the bub-bub-beautiful pip-pip-pelican swallow
The l-l-live little fuf-fuf-fish!

Molière does not hesitate to utilize the defect of stammering to enhance physical and mental awkwardness, and hence the comical side of the characters represented. Our dime museums still keep on amusing the public with their proverbial fat men. The stoutness and fatness of *Falstaff* are utilized by Shakespeare to enhance the comic situations in which *Falstaff* is put.

What is it specially that is comic in the fat man?

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It is the clumsiness, the awkwardness, the angularity, the unwieldy form and mass; "a whale," as Shakespeare puts it; "a whale," as Gogol characterizes one of his comic heroes. The difficulties, instead of being smoothed, the hardships, instead of being eased, the angularities, instead of being rounded out, are visible and protruding at all points. What looks to us clumsy, awkward, and restrained is ludicrous. What is accompanied with effort, with friction, and with great difficulty where such are not expected, is regarded as ludicrous. And this ease holds true in the plays of the child, the games of the populace, the feats of the acrobat, the play of the comedian, and the delicate play of the wit. When difficulties and clumsiness are discerned where there should be ease and grace in the manifestation of energy and action, there we see the ridiculous, and we laugh.

We enjoy and laugh when we are conscious of our spontaneous activity; when our inner energies bubble up freely to the surface of life. We laugh *at* others when we find them wanting, when we find in them *lack* of energy, *lack* of adaptation, clumsiness, awkwardness, clownishness. We laugh at brogue, at dialect, at foreigners talking our language. The same anecdote appears to us more ridiculous when we present it in the incorrect and clumsy way spoken by an Irishman or by a Dutchman.

The following anecdote, for instance, appears more funny when expressed in the lingo of the foreigner:

A German farmer lost his horse and wished to insert an advertisement in the paper. When he came to the editor, the editor asked him what he should put in the paper; the farmer answered, "Yust vat I told you. Vun night, de udder day, a week ago, last month, I heard me a noise by the

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front middle of the pack yard vich did not used to be. So I jumps the ped oud und runs mit der door out, und ven I see, I finds that my pig iron mare, he is tied loose and running mit der stable off. Whoever prings him pack shall pay five dollars reward."

Many a comic author avails himself of the peculiar, broken, corrupt speech of the countryman or of the foreigner to make the public laugh. We can well see where the ridiculous side lies: it is in the clumsiness, the awkwardness of speech. It is the same condition which is found in the case of the stammerer and stutterer. However the case may be, difficulties brought to the foreground, clumsiness, and awkwardness, where the hearer or observer demands or expects ease and grace, excite merriment and laughter.

This law of the difficult manifested in the comic, instead of the expected ease, grace, and almost automatic adaptation and adjustment, is well brought out in Mark Twain's burlesque comments on the German language.

The compounding of words has been the theme of ridicule since the time of Aristophanes, who concocted a word in imitation of the long words of the speculative sophistry of his countrymen, made up of seventy-seven syllables, and meaning simple *hash*. Writers in different countries have ridiculed the Germans for their addiction to the habit of compounding long words which are impossible to pronounce without choking and loss of breath. Thus German scientists invented formidable terms:

FRAUENSCHUENSTEHLENMONOMANIE
LAUTIRANSCHAUUNGSUNTERRICHTSMETODE

Hegel has among his many terms:

SICHINSICHSELBSTREFLECTIREN

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SICHSELBSTERHALTENDE
INSICHREFLECTIRTSEIEN
KAUSALLZUSAMMENHANG
ANUNDFÜRSICHSEIEN
ABSOLUTALLGEMEINE
INSICHZURÜCKGEGANGENSEIEN.

Schopenhauer ridiculed with great vigor the long-winded German style :

“The German weaves his sentences together into one sentence which he twists and crosses, and crosses and twists again; because he wants to say six things all at once, expressed in a high-flown, bombastic language in order to communicate the simplest thought. The long German sentence is involved and full of parentheses like so many boxes one enclosed within another, all padded out like stuffed geese, overburdening the reader’s memory, weakening his understanding and hindering his judgment. . . . This kind of sentence furnishes the reader with mere half-phrases which he is then called upon to collect carefully and store up in his memory, as though they were the pieces of a torn letter which the reader has to put together to make sense. . . . The writer breaks up his principal sentence into little pieces, for the sole purpose of pushing into the gaps thus made two or three other thoughts by way of parenthesis, thereby unnecessarily and wantonly confusing the reader.”

The vagueness and unintelligibility of German philosophy and especially of Hegelian philosophical speculation have been often ridiculed for their meaningless jargon. The Hegelians heap words, sentences, and paragraphs and expect the reader to supply the meaning. I give here a translation from that conundrum of Hegelian philosophical dialectics, a kind of metaphysical Pilgrim’s

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Progress, "Die Phänomenologie des Geistes." The book contains about six hundred pages, with a preface of fifty-eight, and an introduction of twenty-four pages, all closely printed in Gothic type. The passage is from the preface:

"The spiritual alone is the *actual*; it is the being or *Initselfbeing* (Ansichseiende),—the selfcontained and determined,—the *Otherbeing* (Anderseien) or *Forselfbeing* (Fürsichseien)—and in that determination or its *Outerbeing* in itself remaining: or *it is in and for itself*. This *Inandforitsselfbeing* (Anundfürsichseien) is only at first for us or in itself, it is the spiritual *substance*. It must also *be for itself*, must be the knowledge of the spiritual and must be the knowledge of itself as spirit, it must be its own object, but as much immediate or sublimated, in itself reflected object. *It is for itself* but *for us*, in so far as its spiritual content is manifested through itself; in so far however as it is for itself, it is for self, so it is self-manifested, the pure concept, at the same time its own objective element wherein it has its being, and it is in this way in its own being for itself in self-reflected object."

We may take a couple of examples from Hegel's chapter on Perception (Wahrnehmung):

The *this* is thus given as *not this*, or as *sublimated*, and therewith not nothing, but a definite nothing, or a *nothing having a content*, namely, the *this* (Das Dieses ist also gesetzt, als nicht dieses, oder als aufgehoben und damit nicht Nichts, sondern ein bestimmtes Nichts, oder ein Nichts von einem Inhalte nämlich dem Diesen).

The thing is *one*, in itself reflected; *it is for itself* but it is also for *another*; and it is also *another* for itself as it is for another (Das Ding ist Eins, in sich reflectirt; es

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(ist für sich; aber es ist auch für ein Anderes; und zwar ist es ein Anderes für sich, als es für Anderes ist).

The italics are Hegel's. The sense is chiefly in the suggestive power of the italics.

Such metaphysical speculations are recommended by some Hegelians as the profoundest wisdom of modern idealistic philosophy. One is reminded of the semi-Platonic, semi-Hegelian definition of love: "Love is the ideality of the relativity of reality of an infinitesimal part of the infinite totality of the Absolute Being."

All these examples fully illustrate my view of the subject of laughter in general and of the ludicrous in particular. May we not put the matter thus: *There is laughter of enjoyment, the more the difficult becomes easy; but the more the easy is difficult, the more occasion for laughter, or derision.* We laugh in a state of enjoyment when the difficult is accomplished with ease, and we laugh again when the easy is accomplished with difficulty. Shall we say that the one is the *ascending* laughter, the laughter of triumph, and the other the reverse, the *descending* laughter, the laughter over the defeated? We shall return to this view again and consider it more closely: meanwhile it is advisable to approach the matter under consideration from a slightly different standpoint, which may open to us a new horizon.

When we laugh over our triumph or over the defeat of our opponents does it not mean the triumph and defeat in regard to certain difficulties? Such difficulties are supposed to be possible to overcome by the average person belonging to a certain class of which a certain amount of energy as a reaction to external stimuli is required.

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We require of laborers a certain amount or quantity of work, and of artists a certain amount of skill and talent, just as we require of the school boy and the school girl a certain amount of study and knowledge which vary as the grades are higher and as the school belongs to the higher branches of education. This is the standard, the norm required, a norm to which man must be adapted in his social environment.

Standards vary with different levels of society and with various countries and ages. We require of the actor a certain amount and quality of acting, a certain amount of a definite quality of knowledge and practice of the worker, of the engineer, of the lawyer, of the soldier, of the physician, of the artist, of the business man, of the clerk, and of the minister. This requirement varies with each country and with each age. There is a tacitly assumed level in each society to which man and woman must conform. To be able to rise above that level and manifest more than the usual amount and quality of energy gives rise to the smile of satisfaction or to the laughter of enjoyment. A fall below that level arouses in the spectator the converse laughter, the laughter of the comic, the laughter of derision. May we not assert that the reason man laughs is because he is a being of standards, norms, ideas, and ideals? May we not take a step further and assert that laughter is essentially human, inasmuch as it has reference to established standards and ideals?

Moreover, we may say that laughter is essentially social, as it is in relation to the standards of different social groups varying with each country, society, and age. In spite of his extraordinary comic genius, Aristophanes remains sadly neglected, and all the wit of Lucian re-

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mains unappreciated except by the scholar. Standards, ideals, given by training, social, moral, religious, all these guide men in their thoughts, beliefs, and action. These standards form the social level for the individual in each given age and community. It is Pindar, I think, who tells us that custom is the tyrant of man.

May we not say that it is custom or standard given by society that guides the taste of the individual, and anything deviating from the custom, anything uncustomary, is regarded as strange and ridiculous? How many times do we hear old and young fogies tell us when something new is propounded to them: "How peculiar, how strange, whoever heard of such a thing!" The Chinaman regards a woman with large feet as ridiculous; we in return laugh over the bandaged feet of the refined Chinese ladies and the long, twisted nails of their gentlemen. The American laughs at the Chinese pig-tails, and the true Chinaman ridicules the close-cropped European. The Northmen laugh at the Greco-Roman skirts and robes, while the Greco-Roman world ridicules the trousered barbarian. The Englishman and the American, like Mark Twain, ridicule the German language and manners, and the German returns it in the same coin. As in the lower grades of development children laugh at defects and deviations from the human form, so in the more developed grades of human life people laugh at deviations from custom and use. *What is not customary, what is not usual, is laughed at.*

The more restricted a society or a social group becomes, the more it becomes separated from the rest of human societies and from other social groups, the more that isolated society or group will find ludicrous the customs and manners of people with whom they happen to

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be thrown into social contact. Observe how the exclusive Greek or Hebrew rails at the barbarian and the Gentile; how the Chinaman mocks at the European "red barbarian," and the European in turn ridicules John, the Chinaman.

We laugh at the clown because he dresses differently from other people: he wears striped suits with red spots, caps with bells, paints his face in patches with striking colors that call the child's attention as being different from the color of other people. The merry-andrew, the zany, *Punch* and *Judy*, are greeted by children and the uncultivated with peals of laughter, because the dresses, the squeaking voices, differ from the usual—from the customary. Why do we amuse the public in our theaters and summer gardens by bringing on the stage actors imitating the speech, dress, and actions of foreigners? Because foreigners live differently from us, and that is not customary, and hence funny. This source of using the foreigner, or with us the bringing the Dutchman or some similar foreign nationality on the stage as an object for ridicule, is often exploited by the comic writer. In fact, this source of the comic is as old as Aristophanes, who brought before the Greeks the Persian barbarians, *Sham-Artabas*, or the Great King's eye, and utilized this device to make the Greek populace laugh. The device is simple and is based on the principle that we are ready to ridicule what is foreign to us, what we regard as not conforming to use and custom. All deviations from the standard molds, all variations and changes from the usual may become objects of laughter.

CHAPTER IV

LAUGHTER AND NOVELTY

Funny pictures, caricatures, cartoons, illustrations that so amuse our populace and are in such a demand in our newspapers, magazines, and reviews, political and social cartoons, like merry-andrews and clowns, employ various devices in their technique, all based on the fundamental principle—*the deviation from the customary, the habitual, and the usual*. The cartoonist, like the clown in our popular amusement places, plays on the fundamental principle inherent in every human breast—laughter and ridicule at what is regarded as deviations, abnormalities. The cartoonist makes the body small, the head inordinately large, the nose long, the chin protruding, the teeth like tusks. By disfigurements, distortions, deformities, defects, blemishes, and malformations the cartoonist manages to heap ridicule on persons and situations he wishes to revile. Variations from the accepted standard of the normal are regarded as defects, fit for laughter and ridicule.

The production of defects, like all artistic work, must appear as having independent value, not associated with anything useful, but, like all play, the enjoyment forms so to say a closed circle. The play is enjoyed as play, no matter whether or no it makes the observer better, wiser, or more successful in life. All those effects may come, but they are not directly aimed at by play and art.

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The defects are regarded by the observer from a purely artistic standpoint, having deep subconscious associations with fundamental human sympathies and moral life. We laugh at other people; we ridicule their shortcomings and defects, because we regard them as being below the customary standard accepted in the particular age and class of society.

We can understand why new ideas, new views, new reforms are so pitilessly ridiculed. Custom is the soul of society. What deviates from custom is a laughing stock, a butt for ridicule. Aristophanes in his "Clouds" ridicules Socrates and the new-fangled ideas of the Sophists. The Jew, the Christian, the Mohammedan, and the various monotheistic sects ridicule one another; each one is the truth and salvation, each one regards the other as deviating from the custom and usage prevalent in that particular sect and faith. Even a Napoleon ridiculed the proposition of railroads. It was not long ago when people turned up their noses at automobiles as being fit for upstarts only. The flying machine and similar radical changes and inventions introduced into social life have passed through the same process of ridicule. In our newspapers, which reflect the opinions and views of the crowd, of mediocrity, any new work, any new theory is held up to ridicule by the pen of the reporter, the pencil of the editor, and the brush of the pseudo-artist, the cartoonist. Instance, the sardonic laughter of the press over the discovery of the hook-worm, the "germ of laziness," in the South.

Changes, reforms in dress, in education, politics, industry, economy, art, and science, if such changes be not trivial, but radical, excite merriment in the public and their representative wiseacres. Guilds and castes, classes

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and professions are especially averse to the new. The new may prove a poisonous enzyme fermenting and transforming the whole social organization. The sect, the profession, the class are unconsciously inimical to the new-born change which is exposed to ridicule and is thus effectually suppressed.

Plato is aware of the fact that all novelties and reforms lend themselves readily to ridicule. Man is essentially conservative and is kept within the path of custom, as a planet within its orbit. In his "Republic" Plato says :

Not long since it was thought discreditable and ridiculous among the Greeks, as it is now among most barbarian nations, for men to be seen naked. And when the Cretans first, and after them the Lacedæmonians, began the practice of gymnastic exercises, the wits of the time had it in their power to make sport of those novelties. But when experience had shown that it was better to strip than to cover up the body and when the ridiculous effect which this plan had to the eye had given way before the arguments establishing its superiority, it was at the same time, as I imagine, demonstrated that he is a fool who thinks any thing ridiculous but that which is evil, and who attempts to raise a laugh by assuming any object to be ridiculous but that which is unwise and evil.

We can realize the reason why all novelty is distasteful to man, especially if it is totally unfamiliar. Man is married to habit. Custom and routine govern his actions, his beliefs, his hopes, and his life. All barbaric and ancient societies are based on custom, which takes the place of law and is consecrated by religion. *In fact, custom is religion.* As Bagehot has pointed out long ago, the greater part of humanity at present, and for-

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merly the whole of mankind, hated and despised novelty. Change is looked upon as bad and wicked; reform is immoral and ungodly. The greatest of evils, such as cannibalism, human sacrifice, slavery, human degradation in all its atrocious forms, political and economical, are all consecrated by long habit and custom of ages. In fact, our law goes by custom and precedent, no matter how absurd. The same holds true in the methods of training the young. Man is a creature of habit, a slave of custom. Even reason is enlisted on the side of habit and custom. What is unhabitual, unusual, uncustomary is irrational, absurd, and stupid, and, hence, ludicrous.

CHAPTER V

RIDICULE AND SOCIAL DECADENCE

Old worn-out ideals, beliefs, and decrepit institutions meet with ridicule. Thus Lucian jibes at the worn-out ancient deities and myths; the Humanists in various pamphlets such as in the "*Epistolæ Virorum Obscuro-rum*" ridicule the Catholic church; Voltaire makes merry over the supposed glories and optimistic views of the philosophers of the eighteenth century; Bernard de Mandeville ridicules the optimistic ethics of Shaftesbury and of the Cambridge idealists.

Perhaps a few examples taken from the writings of Lucian and Aristophanes may best illustrate our point of view.

In his "*Icaro-Menippus*" Lucian directs his shafts of poignant ridicule against the metaphysical and philosophical speculations, as well as against the whole fabric of ancient tradition and religious beliefs. He jeers at the philosopher, and hobnobs with the once mighty Zeus.

"I engaged them (the philosophers)," *Menippus* tells his friend, "to teach me the perfect knowledge of the universe; but so far were they from removing my ignorance, that they only threw me into greater doubt and uncertainty by puzzling me with atoms, vacuums, beginnings, ends, ideas, forms, and so forth. The worst of all was that though none agreed with the rest in what they advanced, but were all of contrary opinions, yet did every

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one of them expect that I should embrace his tenets and subscribe to his doctrine." *Menippus* became an aeronaut, an aetheronaut would probably be more correct, by taking an eagle's wing and that of a vulture and flew to Olympus to visit Jupiter. Lucian takes here the occasion to put the course and turmoil of human life in a ludicrous light.

I had much to see; to relate it to you is impossible. . . . The Getae at war, the Scythians traveling in their caravans, the Egyptians tilling their fields, the Phœnicians merchandising, the Cilicians robbing and plundering, the Spartans flogging their children, and the Athenians perpetually quarreling and going to law with one another.

When all this was going on at the same time you may imagine what a strange scene it appeared to me. It was just as if a number of singers were met together, every one singing his own song, each striving to drown the other's voice by bawling as loud as he could. You may well fancy what kind of a concert this would make.

Friend. Truly ridiculous and confused, no doubt.

Menippus. And yet such, my friend, are all the poor performers upon earth, and such is the discordant music of human life. Not only are the voices dissonant and inharmonious, but the forms and habits all differ, they move in various directions and agree in nothing, till at length the great master of the choir drives every one from the stage, and tells him he is no longer wanted there. In this wide extensive theater, full of various shapes and forms, everything was a matter of laughter and ridicule. . . . You have often seen a crowd of ants running to and fro and out of their city, some turning up a bit of dung, others dragging a bean, shell, or running away with half a grain of wheat. I have no doubt but they have architects, demagogues, senators, musicians and philosophers among them.

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Menippus appears before Jupiter, who is treated by the adventurer with a most patronizing familiarity. The conversation that follows is full of jests and jibes on the petty character of that august divinity, the father of the gods.

As we went along, he asked me several questions about earthly matters, such as "How much corn is there at present in Greece? Had you had a hard winter last year? Did your cabbages need rain? Is any of Phidias' family alive now? What is the reason that the Athenians have left off sacrificing to me for so many years? Do they think of building up the Olympian temple again?" When I had answered all these questions, "Pray, Menippus," said he, "what does mankind really think of me?" "How should they think of you," said I, "but with the utmost veneration that you are the great sovereign of the gods?" "There you jest."

Nothing can be more ludicrous than this jesting conversation, this patronizing familiarity and small gossip with the mighty father of gods and men. Jupiter complains that his altars are as cold and neglected as Plato's laws or the syllogisms of Chrysippus.

The most ludicrous scene is the description of Jupiter attending to business and petitions.

We came to the place where the petitions were to be heard. Here we found several holes with covers to them. Jupiter goes from hole to hole, removes the lid from each hole listening to various prayers, petitions, vows, news gossip. There is a sort of a chimney with a lid for the fumes of sacrifice to ascend to the abode of the gods.

After the business is over *Menippus* is invited to dinner. The description is full of fun and mockery.

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Ceres served us with bread, Bacchus with wine, Hercules handed about the flesh, Venus scattered myrtles and Neptune brought us fish. I got slyly a little nectar and ambrosia; for my friend Ganymede, if he saw Jove looking another way, would frequently throw me in a cup or two.

Nothing could be more fatal to the dignity and prestige of the ancient religion than this jovial hobnobbing with the Olympic deities, the jesting and bantering with father Jove.

Far more powerful is Aristophanes, the greatest comic writer of all ages. In his "Clouds" Aristophanes represents *Strepsiades*, burdened by debts, coming to *Socrates'* Reflectory, or thinking shop, to be instructed in the not-paying-your-creditors argument.

Strep. Teach me, and I will swear by the gods to pay you your fees.

Socrates. What gods? Gods don't pass current here.

Socrates tells *Strepsiades* that *Zeus* is out of date, and that the only deities worshiped are the *Clouds*, an ironical allusion to the cloudy speculations of philosophy. *Socrates* is represented hanging in a basket between earth and heaven invoking his deities—the *Clouds*. The *Clouds* come and greet the philosopher thus:

Be welcome, high priest of all trumpery trifles, you veteran hunter of words clever and subtle!

Explain the request you desire us to grant you, to no one we hearken as well as to you.

So great is your wisdom and so solemn your glances as we watch your proud strutting along in the streets.

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Soc. You won't believe in any gods beside ours—Clouds, Chaos and Tongue?

Strep. I won't even speak to the rest, if I should meet them.

Clouds. Tell us plainly what you want.

Strep. I want to be the cleverest speaker in Greece.

Clouds. So you shall; no man shall carry more resolutions to the assembly.

Strep. I don't care about resolutions in the assembly; I want to slip through my creditors' hands.

When the old man *Strepsiades* finds the Socratic sophistry too difficult to learn his son *Pheidipedes* goes to the Socratic "Reflectory." When *Pheidipedes* comes home he attacks the old paternal rule and tells his father:

It was man that made the law and why should not I make a new law that the sons beat their fathers. The cock and other animals punish their fathers, and there is no difference between them and us, except that they do not prepare resolutions and decrees in the assembly.

In this way does Aristophanes rail and laugh at the new ideas of the Sophists and the Socratic reforms of individual inquiry, criticism, and analysis. At the same time he lashes with his sharp raillery and mordant ridicule the Athenian assembly for its love of oratory and the introduction of ever new resolutions and bills. Aristophanes ridicules the new ways of education and the extreme, democratic changes incident to the political life of the Athenian commonwealth. He takes his stand on the old modes of life, on the old forms of education and training, on the old religious beliefs and customs that have produced the heroes of Marathon.

In ridiculing Athenian politics Aristophanes gives

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directions to the *Sausage-seller* how to defeat *Cleon*, the Athenian political leader, and to manage the people :

The easiest thing in the world. Do just as you have been doing. Mangle and mash everything. Flavor and spice to suit the people's taste. You have got every qualification for a demagogue. You have a vile voice, you have a low disposition and unscrupulous character.

The contest that follows may well remind one of the American political campaign between Roosevelt and Taft for the highest office in the land.

Cleon. I'll outbawl and outdo you.

Sausage-seller. I'll out-scream and out-squall you. Never do I blush and blink.

Cleon. When I'm dealing, I can swear to things that are not. And, though people heard and saw, I care not.

Compare with the new "National Hymn" made in mockery of Roosevelt and his followers, the so-called Bull Moose Progressive Party :

No matter though he said,
He never could be led
To run again;
We know now it was bluff,
Or some such other stuff
As guff or puff or fluff
In his brain.

Here is the prayer with which the *Sausage-seller* opens his campaign in the Senate :

Hear me, O powers of Fraud and Boobydom, and ye spirits of the market and the street, the places where I was bred, and thou, great Impudence, hear me, and help, giving me courage, and a ready tongue and a shameless voice.

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Aristophanes ridicules the Athenian politics in the same way as the modern cartoonist ridicules the presidential campaign by representing the two presidential candidates, riding to Chicago on the Monopoly Limited with the Trust as their guardian, calling each other names and almost coming to blows. As in the modern political campaign, the *Sausage-seller* accuses *Cleon*:

Thanks to the dust you kick up, Demos can see nothing of what is going on.

Cleon. O my dear Demos, don't believe him. You have never had a better friend or a more watchful one. Haven't I kept you up? Haven't I watched night and day and discovered schemes, treasons, plots and conspiracies? (Corresponding to the scheming of the modern trusts.)

Sausage-seller. Oh, yes, we all know what you mean by your treasons and plots. You are just like the fellows that fish in troubled waters.

Both *Cleon* and the *Sausage-seller* declare their intense love and affection for *Demos*, their supposed master:

Cleon. If I should advise you
Against what is best for your comfort and interest,
May I suffer and perish.

Sausage-seller. O Demos,
No man can more adore you
With so tender a care.

Who cannot read in it the eternal ridicule on political campaigning carried on in democratic countries where *Demos* is the master?

Even a superficial glance at the quotations from Aristophanes discloses the fact that the characters, in-

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stitutions, and new ideas ridiculed are regarded as defective, as wanting in the common social and moral principles of ordinary life. The characters represented are found to be ludicrous, because we are made to realize the inferiority of the persons, institutions, and ideas with regard to the accepted standards of life. Defects where merits should be expected, lack of adjustment where more perfect adaptation is looked for, inferiority to the ordinary level of life where superiority should be expected, all such relations constitute the main conditions under which objects, physical and ideal, are made ridiculous in the eyes of the external observer. This statement in its turn can be further reduced to the more *general principle of lack of energy when an abundance of it is expected, of difficulties, awkwardness, and clumsiness where there should be ease, grace, and manifestation of energy in response to the external and internal stimuli and situations.*

CHAPTER VI

DEVIATIONS AND THE LUDICROUS

Whenever we can prick a vital point in our neighbor, whenever we can find a weak spot in our fellow beings, in their manners, beliefs, institutions, and ideals, there we invariably find the ludicrous. For while we enjoy the spontaneous laughter of free activity and unimpeded manifestation of energy we also feel our superiority by the detection of defects, imperfections, and weakness in our fellow beings, or in the manners which they have, or in the views and beliefs which they entertain. The social brute attacks and kills its weak associate, while man hits his neighbor's weak spots with jibes, ridicule, and laughter.

It is quite probable that laughter, in addition to the fact of its being one of the important psychomotor manifestations of the play instinct, may also be of some use in the biological process of organic social growth. All variations that fall below the average social level have somehow to be corrected and possibly eliminated.

Now when a variation is positively harmful to social life then society defends itself by penalties and punishments. Variations, however, occur all the time in social life, and their tendency is at first uncertain. Many of the variations may be good, and others may be indifferent. Not all variations from the standard can possibly be punished as sins and crimes. It is true that in many

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ancient barbaric and savage societies change and variation are regarded as sinful and criminal. Man must live up to the average standard, any deviation from which is strictly punished by law. Life is prescribed to its very minutiae, even to the cut of the dress, the kind and manner of food and relations with other people. Still, even under such conditions, some slight variations will occur, variations which cannot possibly be provided against. Society wishes to be immune from changes, and especially from uncertain changes, the old way is certain and safe, while a new way may possibly lead to some harmful results. The only sure protection is to guard against all possible changes and variations, however slight and apparently harmless.

Who can foresee whither a variation may tend? May not a given variation be of a harmful, inferior type and tend gradually to disintegrate, to degrade the quality of social life? Variations are risky and dangerous, better not to try them. Life, however, cannot be arrested, variations do occur in societies and tribes, however rigid and stationary their social status. Variations cannot be exactly treated as sinful and criminal, since many of them are quite slight and inoffensive. There are again some that may prove useful. On the whole, however, changes are suspicious, especially if they do not coincide with custom and religion. Something must be done to counteract and destroy the very germ of possible serious changes, or slight eccentricities. Slight eccentricities and trivial changes do not deserve punishment or the use of social force. Society possesses a powerful weapon to kill the germs of variations, to nip them in their bud. This weapon is ridicule. Slight, inoffensive variations are treated as inferior, as below the average

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level, below the normal; such variations or mutations are treated with ridicule; they are regarded as inferior to the normal type and laughed at.

Society does not find it convenient to undertake forcible suppression of slight, incubating, individual mutations; it does not wish to set in motion the machinery of law and order, the judge, the policeman, the soldier, the court, the prison, and the barrack in order to punish small changes, insignificant mutations and trivial eccentricities; they are all put down below the normal and covered with ridicule. Such a powerful solvent is ridicule that few variations or mutations can withstand it. Only mutations of great vigor and vitality can survive the scathing lightning of laughter and ridicule. Few men and women have the hardihood to withstand that peculiar ostracism expressed in social ridicule. Man is gregarious; he must go with the crowd. In fact we may say that man is more afraid of *social ridicule than of actual severe punishment*. Society can thus kill innovations, deviations, variations, mutations, without any severity, without any shedding of blood as the inquisitorial phrase runs; it can smother all new-fangled things and have its laugh and fun beside. Why punish, why not laugh?

To be classed with the rejected, with the inferior, with the abnormal is humiliating to the average man, and more so to the average woman. The average "normal" man and woman dread ridicule. The power of ridicule is so potent, the fear of it is so overwhelming that the stoutest of heart turns coward and runs. Neither persecution nor social ostracism can equal in repressive force social jibe and jeer. *The true hero is he who can ignore social ridicule.*

Persecution is a homage paid to the persecuted. For

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society sees in the persecuted a power to be reckoned with of which it is afraid, but laughter is an innocent merry-making at the expense of the insignificant, the weak, the defective, the inferior, and the trivial. Such an attitude of our neighbors to us is so humiliating that few can bear it. Society thus possesses an amusing and powerful means for the control of variations, deviations, and eccentricities. Man can hardly remain unscathed by the social lye, by the powerful solvent of social ridicule. Laughter is an efficient instrument, inexpensive and apparently mild. "Great enlargement of mind," Pascal tells us, "not less than extreme limitation of faculty is charged with folly. Nothing obtains currency but mediocrity. The multitude have established their order of things and are on the alert to let no one escape who attempts to break through at either end . . ." Neither *Hamlet* mad nor *Hamlet* genius can escape the detection and revenge of the established order.

There are, however, times when decadence sets into the social organism; social rigidity relaxes; then the individual turns on society and repays it in its own coin. Genius discerns the weak spots of the social constitution, of enfeebled institutions, worn out ideas, decaying ideals and beliefs. With the power of his genius the individual brings those defects and faults clearly before the social mind. Like the wasp he stings the social caterpillar in the weakest, in the most vital and most tender points of social organization. Society wriggles in laughter, but it bears the attack often without retaliation. Society is served with its own medicine; it is wounded by its own most powerful weapon. Such a condition is an indication of grave social changes.

The weapon of ridicule is employed by all great re-

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formative movements, such as Humanism, the Reformation, the Renaissance, the English and the French revolutions. The ridicule which the individual turns on society indicates decay of old structures and presages the birth of a new order of things. Under such conditions we find Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Encyclopædists of the eighteenth century. Like Aristophanes, Voltaire made people laugh. The great Greek comic writer ridiculed the new order from the standpoint of the old one, while the great French philosopher made France and Europe laugh away their old worn out institutions and obsolete beliefs. Aristophanes could only see before him a degenerated Greece with all its glory in the past, while Voltaire saw before him a rejuvenated Europe and France with all their greatness in the future.

Perhaps a few examples taken from Voltaire may best elucidate our standpoint:

"How can you prefer senseless stories that mean nothing?"

"That is just why we read them," answered the ladies.

This is a good comment on the literature produced and consumed by ladies in our own times.

Zadig followed the noble maxim of Zoroaster: *When thou eatest give something to the dogs, even though they should bite thee.* Instructed in the sciences of the ancient Chaldeans, he was not ignorant of such principles of natural philosophy as were then known, and knew as much of metaphysics as has been known in any age, that is to say, next to nothing. He was firmly persuaded that the year consisted of 365 days and a quarter, and when the leading magi of his time told him with contemptuous arrogance that he entertained dangerous opinions and that it was a

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proof of hostility to the government to believe that the sun turned on its own axis, he held his peace without showing either anger or disdain.

Zadig's matrimonial troubles are no less interesting.

He fell in love with the admirable Semira. A nobleman, who imagined himself in love with Semira, because he thought himself a better man and was envious and jealous of Zadig, made an attempt to carry off Semira by force, Zadig defended her. Semira pierced the sky with her lamentations. She cried aloud, "My dear husband! They are tearing me from him who is the idol of my heart." Zadig at the risk of his life and with a deep wound in his eye finally succeeded in rescuing Semira. Zadig's wounded eye became worse and gave cause for alarm. Semira's only prayer was that he might be healed. A messenger was sent for Hermes, the famous physician. The physician declared that Zadig would lose his eye, foretelling the day and hour of this sad event. "If it had been the right eye," said he, "I might have cured it; but injuries to the left eye are incurable."

All Babylon admired the profound scientific research of Hermes. Two days afterwards the eye was well again. Hermes wrote a book in which he proved that Zadig ought not to have been cured; but Zadig did not read it. After he got well he found that Semira, objecting to one-eyed people, had in haste married the man who had attempted to carry her off by force. Zadig then chose Azora, who came of the best stock and was the best behaved girl in the city. He married, lived with her for a month in all the bliss of a most tender union; the only faults he observed in her were a little giddiness and a strong tendency to find out that the handsomest young men had always the most intelligence and virtue.

Azora tells Zadig, "I went to console the young widow

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Cosrou, who two days ago raised a tomb to her young husband beside the stream which forms the boundary of this meadow. She vowed in her grief that she would dwell beside that tomb as long as the stream flowed by."

"Well," said Zadig, "a truly estimable woman who really loved her husband!"

"Ah!" returned Azora, "if you only knew how she was occupied when I paid her my visit."

"How then, fair Azora?"

"She was diverting the course of the brook."

Azora broke out into violent reproaches against the young widow. This ostentatious display of virtue was displeasing to Zadig.

He had a friend named Cador who was one of those young men in whom his wife found more merit and integrity than in others. Zadig took him into his confidence and secured his fidelity as far as possible by means of a considerable present. Zadig fell sick, died and was put into a coffin. Cador made love to the young widow and made her go to the tomb to cut off with a razor Zadig's nose. When Azora was about to carry out her intention Zadig suddenly got up, and holding his nose with one hand, stopped the razor with the other. "Madam," he said, "do not cry out against young Cosrou; your intention of cutting off my nose is as bad as that of turning aside a stream."

Zadig was arrested for showing his wisdom in the detection of the escaped queen's dog and the king's horse. He was again arrested for not answering questions about an escaped state prisoner whom he happened by chance to notice through the window. For this offence he was condemned to pay fifty pieces of gold, and he thanked his judges for their leniency, according to the custom of Babylon.

"Good Heavens!" said Zadig to himself, "what a pity it is when one takes a walk in the wood through which the queen's bitch and the king's horse have passed! How

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dangerous it is to stand at a window! and how difficult it is to be happy in this world!"

In ridiculing the religious beliefs and devotions Voltaire tells that while in Benares in passing a fakir, he happened to sneeze. The sneeze awakened the fakir who was in a trance.

"Where am I?" said he, "what a horrible fall I have had! I can no longer see the tip of my nose; the celestial light has vanished."

"If I am the cause," said I, "that you see at last beyond the tip of your nose, here is a rupee to repair the damage that I have committed; recover your celestial light."

My friend Omri brought me into the cell of one of the most famous gymnosophists, whose name was Bababec. He was as naked as an ape and, having a chain round his neck which must have weighed more than sixty pounds, was seated on a wooden chair neatly furnished with sharp little nails which ran into his posteriors. Many women came to consult him as an oracle on family affairs and he enjoyed the highest reputation.

"Do you think, father," said the former, "that after my soul has undergone transmigration I may be able to reach the abode of Brahma?"

"That depends," said the fakir, "what is your manner of life?"

"I endeavor," said Omri, "to be a good citizen, a good husband and a good friend."

"Do you ever drive nails into your bottom?" asked the Brahmin.

"Never, reverend father."

"I am sorry for it," replied the fakir, "you certainly will not enter the nineteenth heaven and that is a pity."

"Into which heaven do you expect to go, Mr. Bababec?"

"Into the thirty-fifth."

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"You are a droll fellow," replied Omri, "to expect a higher lodging,—that expectation can only proceed from an inordinate ambition. You damn those who seek for honor in this life, why do you aim at honors for yourself in the next? . . . I reckon that man is worth a hundred times more who sows pot-herbs or plants trees than the tribe of you and your fellows who look at the tip of their noses, carry a pack-saddle to show the extreme nobility of their souls."

Having spoken thus, Omri soothed, coaxed, persuaded, at last induced Bababec to leave his nails and his chain then and there, to come home with him and lead a respectable life. They scoured him well, they rubbed him all over with perfumed essences, they clothed him decently and he lived for a fortnight in a thoroughly rational way, manifesting that he was a hundred times happier than before. But he lost credit with the people, and the women came no more to consult him; so he left Omri and betook himself once more to his nails in order to recover reputation.

Thus Voltaire makes merry over religion, its beliefs and its saints.

In his "Plato's Dreams" Voltaire tells us that *Demogorgon* had as his share the morsel of mud which we call the Earth; and having arranged it in the manner in which we see it to-day, he claimed to have created a masterpiece. He was criticized by one of his brother genii as follows:

You have accomplished a fine piece of work. Your onion and artichoke are very good, but I cannot conceive what your idea could have been in covering the earth with so many deadly plants, unless you intended to poison the inhabitants. Moreover, it appears that you have some thirty different kinds of monkeys, a much greater number of dogs and only four or five varieties of the human race. It is

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true that you have given the last animal what you are pleased to call reason in all conscience. This reason of yours is too ridiculous and is not far removed from madness. Besides it seems to me that you do not set much store by this animal, seeing you have given it so many enemies, such scanty means of defense, so many diseases and so few remedies, so many passions and so little wisdom. You have no wish apparently that many of those creatures should remain alive; for, without mentioning the other dangers to which you expose them, you have contrived so well that some day the small pox will carry off regularly every year the tenth part of mankind, and its twin sisters will taint the life in the nine parts left. As if that was still not enough you have so disposed the course of events that one half of the survivors will be occupied in law-suits, and the other half in mutual slaughter. They will doubtless be much obliged to you, and you have surely achieved a splendid masterpiece.

In his "Candid" he ridicules the Leibnitzian preëstablished harmony and the shallow optimism of the eighteenth century. *Pangloss*, the professor of optimism, says:

Things cannot be otherwise than they are; for everything being made for a certain end, the end for which everything is made is necessarily the best end. Our legs are clearly intended for shoes and stockings and so we have them. Pigs were made to be eaten and so we eat pork all the year round. Consequently, those who have asserted that all is well have said what is silly; they should have said of everything that is, that it is the best that could possibly be.

Private misfortunes. *Pangloss* teaches, promote the public good, so that the more private misfortunes there

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are the better it is for the world. Pain and misfortune engender happiness and joy.

Across the channel, in England, Bernard de Mandeville ridiculed English ethical optimism, rampant among the nobility and universities, in essays entitled "Private Vices Public Benefits," for which he earned the name Man-Devil.

Voltaire would hardly have modified his attacks on optimism, though he might have expressed them in a more scientific and biological form had he lived in our century of the glorification of competition and sanctification of the principle of the struggle for existence and the elimination of the weak.

If we examine the work of Aristophanes and Voltaire, separated as they are by a chasm of more than a score of centuries, we find that with their penetrating genius they have discovered the weak points in the lives of their contemporaries, and that they have inserted the sting of ridicule in the most vulnerable parts of the social organism. Out of the dark depths of unconsciousness of social automatisms, habits, customs, and beliefs they have dragged to the light of consciousness the symptoms and processes of mental, moral, and social decay. Laughter at institutions and beliefs is an indication of social degeneracy and regeneracy.

From the superior standpoints occupied by those great men of genius they were able to see the inferiority of the prominent and governing personalities, they were enabled to disclose to the view of their contemporaries the low state of the institutions and beliefs which they attacked by their ridicule. Aristophanes shows the defects, the shortcomings, the inferiority of the Sophists, of the Demos, of the political boss, of the demagogue;

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while Voltaire reveals the failures, the grave faults, the blemishes of the then reigning shallow, optimistic philosophy, the low state of social organization of the times, the crudities of the moral and religious beliefs, the emptiness of accepted opinions, the hollowness of creeds and faiths hallowed by tradition and authority of state and church.

In both writers we find that the high are leveled to the ground, the strong are shown to be weak, the superior are found to be really inferior. Both of them reveal to the gaze of the observer difficulties, hardships, troubles, defects, deformities, incompetency, awkwardness, clumsiness, deceit, profligacy, vice where there should have been high-mindedness, ease, grace, nobility, superiority, goodness, health, growth, and strength.

Persons, institutions, and beliefs exposed to ridicule are treated with respect by society for their supposed superiority and virtue. This respect, this belief in superiority and virtue, is shown to be unfounded and treated with ridicule. The object or subject laughed at is covered by social tradition with a cloak of dignity, superiority, and righteousness. The purpose of ridicule is the tearing aside the cloak of assumed dignity, thus exposing the object in its full nakedness. The defects and weaknesses of the ridiculed object, whether person, institution, or belief, are exposed to the view of the external observer. Hence the shame awakened in the person against whom the jest, the joke, or the ridicule is directed.

The ridiculed person may even be conscious of his shortcomings, but he may still parade them under the garb of merits and virtues, under the cloak of superior nature, position, birth, or wealth. Man craves for the

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homage, for the respect of his fellow beings. Man hungers for praise, for fame. In the average man such a craving may not be intense, but there is present an intense regard for the opinion of one's neighbor or one's friends. We may lay it down as a social law that *men, and especially women, fear the disapprobation of their fellow-beings; they fear disapprobation all the more when it is given to them in the form of disrespect as expressed by ridicule.* For ridicule means disapprobation, humiliation; it means inferiority, degradation. Ridicule means the placing of the person below the level of the class to which he belongs by birth, connection, occupation, education, and training. Ridicule is like social ostracism and, possibly worse, it is like cutting the member from off the social body. To be ignored by one's neighbors and friends is by no means a matter of indifference, but to become an object of ridicule is unbearable to gregarious man. As the poet puts it: *Ferreus est, si quis, quod sinit alter, amat.* Iron-hearted is he who loves what others leave.

As a gregarious animal man is in terror of social disapprobation. Man is afraid "to lose face," as the Chinaman puts it. The greatest, the most intense fear that haunts men, and possibly more so women, throughout their whole life, is to lose their social standing, to fall below the given social requirements. One hardly realizes what a potent instrument ridicule is in the hands of society, class, caste, and profession. In many cases *fear of social ridicule amounts almost to a panic.* Many a case of nervous trouble known as psychoneurosis takes its origin in fear, in panic of a possible moral fall below the traditional social requirements. The conservative social forces never lose their grip on the individual; they

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are always ready to choke him at the least offence. Moreover, through education and social suggestion those social forces work on the consciousness and conscience of the individual himself. *The possible degradation becomes a fear of conscience.*

In my "Psychology of Suggestion" I have pointed out: "The rules, the customs, the laws of society are categorical, imperative, absolute. One must obey them on pain of death (it may be social death, it may be ridicule). Blind obedience is a social virtue." "The vast majority of persons," Galton tells us, "of our race have a natural tendency to shrink from the responsibility of standing and acting alone; they exalt the *vox populi*, even when they know it to be the utterance of a mob of nobodies, into the *vox Dei*, and they are willing slaves to tradition, authority, and custom." In the same volume of mine I point out what a depressing influence society exercises on the individual:

"With the growth and civilization of society institutions become more stable, laws more rigid, individuality is more and more crushed out, and the poor, barren sub-waking self is exposed in all its nakedness to the vicissitudes of the external world. In civilized society laws and regulations press on the individual from all sides. Whenever one attempts to rise above the dead level of commonplace life instantly the social screw begins to work, and down is brought upon him the tremendous weight of the socio-static press, and it squeezes him back into the mire of mediocrity, frequently crushing him to death for his bold attempt. Man's relations in life are determined and fixed for him; he is told how to put on his tie, and the way he must wear his coat; such should be the fashion of his dress on this particular occasion,

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and such should be the form of his hat; here must he nod his head, put on a solemn air; and there take off his hat, make a profound bow, and display a smile full of delight. Personality is suppressed by the rigidity of social organization; the cultivated, civilized individual is an automaton, a mere puppet.

"Under the enormous weight of the socio-static press, under the crushing pressure of economical, political, and religious regulations there is no possibility for the individual to determine his own relations in life; there is no possibility for him to move, live, and think freely; the personal self sinks, the suggestible, subconscious, social, impersonal self rises to the surface, gets trained and cultivated, and becomes the hysterical actor in all the tragedies of historical life. . . ." The individual fears the power of society. Like a child, man runs in terror when society turns to him its comic mask. Laughter and ridicule are weapons which society finds potent enough to strike terror into the hearts of its disobedient children.

No less potent, however, is ridicule in the hands of the reformatory or, more truly to say, formative social forces. While Aristophanes represents the power of ridicule on the side of the conservative social forces, Voltaire represents the dissolving power of ridicule, directed by the formative forces of society.

Deviations and variations from the usual, customary standard arouse laughter, but not all of them are ludicrous. Deviations and variations toward the superior are by no means subject to ridicule: only those deviations are ridiculed that can be shown to be defects, variations toward the abnormal, toward the inferior type of life. Saints, martyrs, and men of genius are not ridiculed, if

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we recognize them as superior. Men are respected and revered as great, as geniuses in the domain of social, mental, and moral life, if they live up to the highest ideal current in that particular society. Should, however, different ideals appear the men who live up to the old ideals would be regarded as inferior and become the subject of ridicule, as *Don Quixote* after the ideal of chivalry had passed away.

When the substance of the old society has become eaten out, and when, like a caterpillar in its chrysalis, the new order is ready to emerge, the old skin is broken through by the light, airy touches of sarcasm, irony, satire, and ridicule. Such, for instance, we find the case to be in the days of the first Christian era, when Lucian ridiculed the ancient beliefs, myths, and old gods; such we find the times of the Reformation and Humanism. When at the end of the eighteenth century the mediæval institutions and beliefs fell into decrepitude and decay, preserving apparently their outward healthy aspect, we find Voltaire and the Encyclopædists making merry over them. Like furniture devoured by South American ants, nothing but the exterior shell remained of the mediæval institutions. Ridicule gave the final blow and the whole structure crumbled into dust. Ridicule shows the old things as being but the semblance of reality, falsehood disguised as truth, solemn social relations as conventionalities, deceptions and simulacra of life.

Things and persons that have an important and solemn aspect and are shown to be unimportant and trivial are laughed at. In other words, things are ludicrous when we show the superior to be really the inferior. This is why imitations of the sacred, the elevated, the solemn, grand, devotional and ceremonial easily lend themselves

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to ridicule and mockery. The grand is ludicrous when it is regarded as pomposity, and the holy is ridiculous when it is looked upon as common and vulgar; the pure is impure and polluted; even wit may be turned into ridicule by relating it to buffoonery. Ridicule and mockery are dangerous weapons to wield, as they may be turned against the very people who use them.

The degradation of the solemn and superior by raising the base, the inferior and the trivial so that the latter imitate in appearance the former gives rise to parody and travesty of which we give the following examples:

A tavern-keeper offended by his negligence the lawyers who crowded his tavern. With one accord the lawyers forsook the tavern leaving behind them the following parody on the Declaration of Independence:

"When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for a half-hungry, half-fed, imposed-on set of men, to dissolve the bonds of landlord and boarder, a decent respect for the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which have impelled them to separation.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created with mouths and stomachs; and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, etc."

As another example we may take a parody on Poe's "Raven":

Once upon a midnight chilling, as I held my feet unwilling
O'er a tub of scalding water, at a heat of ninety-four;
Nervously a toe in dipping, dripping, slipping, then out-
skipping,
Suddenly there came a ripping whipping, at my chamber's
door—

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"'Tis the second floor," I mutter'd, "flipping at my chamber's door,
Wants a light—and nothing more!"

Ah! distinctly I remember, it was in the chill November,
And each cuticle and member was with Influenza sore;
Falt'ringly I stirred the gruel, steaming creaming o'er the
fuel,
And anon removed the jewel that each frosted nostril bore,
Wiped away the trembling jewel that each reddened nostril bore—
Nameless here for evermore!

And I recollect a certain draught that fanned the window
curtain,
Chill'd me, filled me with a horror of two steps across the
floor;
And besides, I'd got my feet in, and a most refreshing
heat in,
To myself I sat repeating—"If I answer to the door—
Rise to let the ruffian in who seems to want to burst the
door,
I'll be —— that and something more."

CHAPTER VII

RIDICULE AND THE SUBCONSCIOUS

While persons, classes, professions, institutions, beliefs are divested of their dignity, while they are thrown down from the superior position which they occupy in the eyes of the public, the public itself must be prepared to appreciate the funny and the ridiculous side of what is made an object of laughter. A Protestant, a Jew, a Mohammedan may enjoy a joke at the expense of Catholicism; a Catholic may laugh at some ludicrous aspect of some other faith. A good Catholic, however, will be horrified by a joke or an anecdote on the Catholic faith; a religious person will be shocked at a jest at the expense of religion. As the ancient Greek put it, "We should praise the Athenians in Athens." "We here in America," our ex-president tells us, "hold in our hands the hope of the world."

One cannot help agreeing with the Heraclitean paradox: "Fools, even when they hear the truth, are like deaf men; of them the proverb holds true: being present they are absent."

In order to appreciate a joke the audience must already regard the object of the joke with lack of reverence. The audience must subconsciously be prepared to look upon the object of ridicule as inferior. The Humanists could ridicule mediæval ideas, the Reformers

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could rail at the religious beliefs of the Catholic Church, the French Encyclopædists could treat lightly of the French institutions and beliefs, because the latter were already subconsciously undermined in the mind of the French nation. In order, then, that ridicule may successfully bring out the inferiority of the ridiculed object the public must be willing to accept such a relation of inferiority, nay, has already formed beforehand that view of inferiority *subconsciously*. The ridicule brings to the surface what has already been present in the subconscious region of the mind. As the great artist brings to the surface of consciousness the ideal of his time and gives expression to the subconscious strivings of his contemporaries, so does the great comic writer give expression to the subconscious views of his fellow-men in regard to the ideals, beliefs, and institutions that are in the process of degeneration and generation, and of which the people are as yet unconscious, or but vaguely conscious.

Such subconscious preparedness is one of the most fundamental conditions of the ludicrous. Aristophanes rails at the nascent ideas of cosmopolitanism against which the narrow spirit of Athenian aristocratic, exclusive democracy fought so desperately. In his "Frogs," however, he does not hesitate to treat irreverently the old religious beliefs; he makes a burlesque and farce of Bacchus and of Hades; Æschylus is made a laughing stock for his clumsy, heavy, pompous, didactic verses. In his "Birds" Aristophanes, no less than the later irreverent Lucian and Voltaire, banters about the sacred, ancient, mythological beliefs; he holds up the gods for the amusement of his countrymen. The jokes of Aristophanes were keenly appreciated by the Greeks,

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because he expressed the subconscious tendencies of the Hellenic world.

The Greeks, like the Hebrews, were exclusive in regard to all other nations. They were not in sympathy with the high and broad humanitarian morality taught by Socrates. Even Aristotle, the greatest thinker of antiquity, was Greek at heart; he maintained that the Greeks were masters by nature, and that all other nations, included by him under the disparaging term of barbarians, were the legitimate prey of the Hellenes, and especially of the highly intellectual and refined Athenians. The Greeks divided the world of mankind into Hellenes and aliens or barbarians, just as the Jew regarded himself as the chosen people of Yahweh, and regarded all other nations as benighted pagans, heathen, and Goim. Socrates, preaching in the streets, market places, and gymnasia of Athens, could not have chosen a more unfavorable environment for the dissemination of his humanitarian philosophy. Like the ancient Hebrew prophets, with Jesus and the Apostles as their culmination, Socrates preached his cosmopolitan, humanitarian philosophy to a crowd that was called upon, in the name of a higher ideal, to renounce their privileges as superiors and put themselves on a level with the inferiors, barbarians and slaves. We know the bitter opposition of the Greeks and the Macedonians to the leveling and cosmopolitan spirit of Alexander of Macedon. Aristophanes, in addressing himself to the Greeks in his biting invective, in his ridicule at the new-fangled ways of extreme, democratic institutions, at new ideas and ideals, found a sympathizing audience in the Athenian *Demos* whom he cajoled, whom he laughed at, but with whose interests he was in the deepest sympathy.

The ancient mythology was internally decaying

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among the ancient Greeks. The Athenian could not help laughing when Aristophanes directed his jibes against the old-fashioned, antiquated myths and old wives' tales, as Plato characterized them. The keen mind of the ancient Greek could not accept literally and in good faith the stories and nursery-tales told him by the nurse-slaves, nor could he have faith in the holy legends related to him by his own mother and sister—all the more so as the Greek cherished a feeling of contempt for all women as inferiors to men in general and to gentlemen (*καλοὶ ἀγαθοὶ*) in particular. The Athenians were thus prepared subconsciously for the sharp, critical, overwhelming ridicule, scoffing, raillery, derision, and mockery of the Aristophanic plays and comedies.

When the ancient faith died among the nations of the Greco-Roman world they enjoyed the jibes of Lucian against their gods. When the Catholic faith weakened in many European countries the people began to enjoy stories and anecdotes about priests and religion. When the mediæval institutions, with their ideals and beliefs, began to totter the great French philosopher and satirist injected into them the poison of his raillery, and the whole of France and Europe were convulsed with laughter at the agonizing writhing of the old decaying order. Aristophanes, Lucian, Voltaire gave expression to the subconscious stirrings of the spirit of the times. The comic writer points out the weak, the inferior aspects of the object or subject which he makes the butt of his ridicule, but the people who are made to laugh must first of all be in deep, subconscious sympathy with the views of the scoffer. In military and theocratic societies the merchant, the trader, is an object of ridicule. In modern business communities the learned man, the thinker, is

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regarded as a ludicrous figure. Novels and stories have been written to that effect for the amusement of the practical business man.

Ghosts are usually regarded with awe and with fear. A number of stories of ghosts and apparitions has been written to arouse the feeling of awe. The ghost is regarded as something mysterious, awe-inspiring and belonging to a supernatural world far superior to our material earthly existence. Harking back to our religious fears of old, ghosts belong to the superior divine world of spirits and gods. Ghosts have been worshipped by mankind as gods. This belief still lingers in our faith and is still deeply imbedded in our subconscious life. With the awakening, however, of the modern spirit of inquiry and scepticism, the world of ghosts has fallen into disrepute with the more educated classes. Accordingly we find that ghosts are treated with irreverence and are held up to the ridicule of the subconsciously unbelieving crowd. To make a burlesque of a spectre is no longer a sacrilege as it would have been regarded in early ages of spirit worship. The spectres and ghosts begin to be utilized as material for the amusement of the multitude. Thus Thomas Ingoldsby, in "The Ingoldsby Legends," ridicules the usual ghost stories by regarding them as dreams and silly nightmares.

" 'Tis known how much dead gentlefolks eschew
The appalling sound of 'Cock-a-doodle-do! ' "

In another story, "The Spectre of Tappington," the ghost is made to steal breeches and various other articles of apparel. When the victim regards the matter as a practical joke to his friend, the latter laughs:

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"Laugh as you will, Tom, be as incredulous as you please. One fact is incontestable—the breeches are gone! I am reduced to my regimentals and if these go, to-morrow I must borrow of you!"

Rochefoucauld says, "There is something in the misfortunes of our very best friends that does not displease us; certainly we can most of us laugh at their petty inconveniences, till called upon to supply them."

The ghost is further put in a ridiculous light when the servant, in his Irish dialect, relates the way he has met with the apparition:

"Sure then, and it's meself will tell your honor the rights of it," said the ghost-seer. "Meself and Miss Pauline, sir,—or Miss Pauline and meself, for the ladies come first anyhow,—we got tired of the hobstroppylous skrim-maging among the ould servants, that didn't know a joke when they seen one; and we went out to look at the comet,—that's the Rory-Bory-Ale-House, they calls him in this country,—and we walked upon the lawn,—and divel of any ale house there was there at all; and Miss Pauline said it was because of the shrubbery maybe, and why wouldn't we see it better beyonst the trees, and so we went to the trees, but sorrow a comet did meself see there, barring a big ghost instead of it."

"A ghost, and what sort of a ghost, Barney?"

"Och, then divil a lie, I'll tell your honor, a tall ould gentleman he was, all in white, with a shovel on his shoulder, and a big torch in his fist,—though what he wanted with that it's meself can't tell, for his eyes were like gig-lamps, let alone the moon and the comet, which wasn't there at all:—and 'Barney,' says he to me,—'Cause why he knew me,—'Barney,' says he, 'what is it you're doing with the colleen there, Barney?'—divil a word did I say. Miss Pauline screeched and cried murther in French, and ran

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off with herself; and of course meself was in a mighty hurry after the lady, and had no time to stop palavering with him anyway; so I dispersed at once, and the ghost vanished in a flame of fire!"

Frank Stockton with American levity, free from tradition and superstition, treats ghosts with contempt and covers them with ridicule. In his story, "The Transferred Ghost," he makes ghosts look for positions as his countrymen do for government places, and one of such ghostly place hunters gets himself into trouble by obtaining in his haste an extremely uncomfortable position to a vigorous old man who refuses to die. The poor ghost is full of terror of the old man and is haunted by the very presence of the living reality. The tables are thus turned, the ghost is haunted by the living. The superior is lowered and becomes inferior. At the same time there is a by-play of misapprehension in the conversation between the ghost and the principal character—the young lady present thinks that the words directed to the unseen and inaudible ghost are meant for her. The ghost finally finds his rest when he gets transferred to another position.

A similar play of the comic we find in Stockton's "The Spectral Mortgage." The superior dignities and moral elevation associated with ghosts are treated with similar frivolity, ghosts are reduced from their high position which they claim in the fancy and beliefs of the people. The ghost is an old buck, he makes love to a young lady who laughs at the poor devil, he collapses as soon as he discovers the young lady was only fooling with him. This is accompanied with a by-play of misapprehension between lovers, a situation which enhances the comic play.

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From our present vantage ground we can well see how our theory of the ludicrous agrees with the theory of Bain: "The degradation of some personal interest possessing dignity in circumstances that excite no other strong emotion." In fact, the idea of inferiority must already be lodged subconsciously in the mind of the audience that laughs at the joke. Unless a bond of sympathy be established between the audience and the person who ridicules, the ridicule is a failure.

There is apparently no sympathy for the object or subject of ridicule in the lower form of the comic. Such a feeling seems to destroy the success of ridicule, but there must be a subconscious tie of sympathy between the man who makes the comic sally and the audience. In the lower forms of comic art what the comic writer or the man who laughs at somebody or at something guards against is the awakening of sympathy or pity. Such emotions are the antitoxin of the low stages of the ludicrous. The merits, virtues, pain, and suffering of the butt of ridicule are put in the background, and only the demerits, the failings, the failures, the defects, the shortcomings are in the foreground before the audience. The audience in this respect is distracted from all other considerations.

Perhaps we may say that in all art a slight form of hypnoid-like state must be induced in the audience. In the theater where comic plays are presented the conditions of hypnoidization are favored by the distraction of attention from all other objects, from all other qualities of the object against which the comic is directed. Then there is again the fixation of attention and limitation of voluntary movements which form the main conditions in the process of induction of subconscious states.

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Our view of the comic includes all the other theories proposed since the time of Aristotle for the explanation of the ludicrous, the funny, and the comic. "The ridiculous," says Aristotle in his "Poetics," "is a certain error, and turpitude unattended with pain and destruction. Thus, for instance, a ridiculous face is something deformed and distorted without pain." Here Aristotle points out the fact that the ridiculous deals with making the subject of ridicule inferior, and he also refers to the fact that the sympathy of the hearer is not awakened. When the object is made ridiculous the fact of its pain and misery or destruction which may result should be put in the background. The joke, ridicule, or comedy must be presented in its artistic garb with no harmful consequences to the butt of ridicule. Like all art, the comic must be performed for its own sake with no special purpose except the higher ideal requirements of abundance of energy, of ease and grace absent in the object laughed at.

The motive which forms the source out of which the ridiculous arises is disguised and hidden from direct view. Bain corrects Aristotle's definition by adding that Aristotle would have been nearer the mark, if he had expressed it "as causing something to appear mean that was formerly dignified; for to depict what is already under a settled estimate of meanness has little power to raise a laugh."

Hobbes maintains that "Laughter is a sudden glory arising from sudden conceptions of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly." This theory fully agrees with our own, only Hobbes gives it in a short definition which he has left without any further development.

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We shall, however, see further that, although Aristotle and Hobbes are right in the main, there are other and higher aspects of the ludicrous which do not fully fall within the frames of their definition. We cannot help agreeing with Bain when he says that "the comic is fed by false or faded dignities; by affectation and hypocrisy; by unmeaning and hollow pomp."

CHAPTER VIII

THE LUDICROUS AND RESERVE ENERGY

We may once more return to a close scrutiny of the ludicrous. We have shown that we laugh at any deviation from the customary, from the normal, but, as we have pointed out, the lower forms of the comic do not awaken any other emotion except the sense of the ludicrous. The one who ridicules, the comic writer, anesthetizes his audience so that no attention should be paid to anything else. Any thing, any action, or any saying that manifestly falls below the social or the normal human standard is an object of ridicule. Why do we laugh at the defective, at the abnormal? Because, as we have shown, we feel our superiority, we feel that we are normal, that we possess the power, the energy which the object of ridicule lacks. Such a feeling of superiority is joyful, and we have the psychomotor manifestation characteristic of joy, namely, smiles and laughter, at the expense of another person. We feel bigger, because another one is belittled; we feel the joy of superiority, because another one has been made inferior; we are raised, because another has been humiliated. "It is sweet," sings Lucretius, "when on the great sea the winds trouble its waters, to behold from land another's deep distress; not that it is a pleasure and delight that any should be afflicted, but because it is sweet to see from

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what evils you are yourself exempt." This exemption from evil or inferiority detected by the comic in another is one of the main factors in laughter.

We must, however, also take into consideration the response of a normal amount of energy to an external stimulus found to be inferior in character. The superabundant, spontaneous overflow of unused energies gives rise to joy and its accompaniment, laughter. When we expect the normal and are adjusted to respond to it by an amount of energy, and then the subnormal is discovered, the amount of energy that is left goes into the overflow, giving rise to laughter.

We have shown that any amount of superabundant energy, as in the case of children and vigorous people, gives rise to joy and laughter. Hence, when some source of reserve energy is tapped by an appropriate stimulus the result is joy and consequent laughter. In fact, we may say that any *release of reserve energy is the source of all laughter*. This holds true in the case of laughter due to the manifestation of animal spirits and sheer joy of living in growing animals, children, and healthy, vigorous people. What the joker, the comic writer, does is to release sources of reserve energy.

When there is apparent difficulty, ease is shown to be present; where dignity is expected with its restraint and stiffness, lightness and freedom are shown to be possible; where there is resistance, there no opposition is shown; and where apparently effort is required, there relaxation is amply sufficient; where strength is expected, there weakness is proven; and where overwhelming effects of superior merits and qualities are expected, there are found demerits and defects. The superfluous energy in response to the stimulus is

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found superabundant and the overflow comes out in hilarious laughter.

The disposition to see all those states may have been subconsciously in the observer for some time, but passed unnoticed. This disposition is revealed by the appropriate joke or ridicule made by the person who first notices the changed attitude and has the power and the courage to express the subconscious changes. It is like water on a still, frosty day, a stone thrown into the liquid freezes the whole surface. The least motion brings about the crystallization into ice, the disposition to which was prepared by the low temperature of the water. The joke brings to light the disposition of the soul; the joke tumbles down structures hoary with age, but all rotten within. The structure appears strong superficially, it is good to look upon, but the first shock of ridicule shows weakness, and at the same time releases subconscious energies which are for the first time brought to light by the laughing impact of the bearing down ridicule. We may lay it down as a law that *whatever reveals weakness in an object of superior standing and releases in the audience subconscious sources of hidden reserve energy is a fit subject for laughter and ridicule.*

Conversely, as we have pointed out, when under ordinary normal circumstances, more energy is spent where less energy is requisite, the object is a matter of ridicule—the observer regards the object as ludicrous.

This, however, does not mean that Freud and his followers are right in claiming that economy of energy is itself a groundwork of the ridiculous and the comic. It is not the economy that is the cause of laughter; on the contrary, the waste of energy may be very great and

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still the pleasure of the feeling of joy with its accompanying manifestations of laughter may be present. In fact, where economy is required there is little occasion for laughter. Laughter is the outburst of power, the manifestation of inner energy. In fact, the consciousness of waste, the consciousness that such extravagance is possible for us, the assurance that we possess great supplies of energy, such a state of consciousness is the very source of the feeling of superiority and joy, it is the main cause of laughter, ridicule, and the comic.

Play is the manifestation of inner subconscious energies which have been lying dormant during our ordinary humdrum daily activities. The play of the comic is no exception. We laugh when hidden reserve energies are awakened in us. We laugh from the very joy of living. Animals and children in their exuberance of energy are hilarious and boisterous. Even serious-minded adults become full of joy and laugh when the tide of inner reserve energy keeps beating on their otherwise gray and monotonous shore of life.

We do not wish for any economy of energy in our life of joyful activities—such economy is good in business, in manufacture, industry, and general occupation of life. There is no economy in the joys of our playful activities.

In the ludicrous the important element is not economy. In fact, where such economy is present laughter is absent. The joys of laughter never go with economy of energy. It is the consciousness of the ease of expenditure, of waste of energy that forms the joy of laughter and the merriment of the comic. The very waste of energy with ease and grace, the consciousness of untold riches, the unconsciousness of all else that may take place

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afterward, these form the very backbone, the very essence of inner joy and laughter.

Where there is relief from all economy of energy, wherever we can spend with ease and with grace all we will, there joy of laughter is present. As the smiling roses in June, as the gladsome summer fields, as glades full of daisies and buttercups and marigolds, as the rich green of the grass and the living limbs of trees waving their rich vestments of leaves in the summer sunshine, and fanned by southern winds, come not out of the thrifty economy of some artificial greenhouse, nor from the parsimony of some commercial hothouse, but out of the exuberant womb of Mother Nature, out of the vast storehouse of the sun's energy, where expenditure is not counted, whence endless hosts of life proceed, countless masses of rich vegetation, mighty trunks, starlike flowers, green foliage, and juicy fruits grow, bud, bloom, and ripen, so is it with laughter. *Laughter comes not out of economy, but out of abundance.*

Consciousness of reserve energy gives rise to joy and merriment with their concomitant manifestations of smiling and laughing. Whenever and wherever a stimulus can tap a source of reserve energy which is mentally experienced as an abundance, joy and laughter come to life. There is no economy and no niggardliness in the source of laughter. Laughter is born of lavishness and dies with thriftiness. Out of ease, out of abundance laughter grows, flowers, and ripens its golden fruit. "They who sow in tears shall reap in joy" sings the psalmist. "Weeping walks he who draws the burden, but he comes with singing who carries the sheaves." The economy of sowing is sad, but the lavishness of the crop is full of mirth, joy, and laughter.

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This agrees with the Spencerian doctrine that any great accession of energy chooses laughter as its outlet. The laughter that goes with the ludicrous is present when anything regarded consciously as superior and subconsciously as inferior finds its expression of inferiority in the consciousness of the hearer or of the observer. The great task of comedy and of every amusement is to be able to tap ever new sources of latent, subconscious, reserve energy.

We can well understand why Groos connects the enjoyment of the comic with the fighting instinct. There is a forward, assailing element in the comic and laughter. It is the daring to find inferiority and blemishes where until now there have been respect, reverence, and even fear. Laughter would never have come from the mere pointing out of defects, failures, and shortcomings; it mainly comes from exuberance of spirits, from latent reserve, subconscious energy which it awakens to activity. This reserve energy making man more active, more daring in regard to superior persons and objects of life, giving rise to the feeling of the joy of life which accompanies the free manifestation of subconscious reserve energy, making man feel more courageous, more energetic, and apparently careless as to consequences, greatly resembles the fighting instinct.

There is no need, however, to identify such a state with the fighting instinct, no more than an inventor or scientific discoverer should be literally identified with a scout and a spy. Under the influence of superabundant energy, under the influence of the manifestation of reserve energy, man can attempt more than in his ordinary normal condition. There is no more of the fighting instinct in it than there are actual aggression and fight in

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the self-sacrifice of martyrs for their beliefs and ideas, or in the preaching of Socrates, Jesus, and Buddha to a sinful, erring world. Laughter and the fighting instinct are akin only in so far as both of them are manifestations of superabundant energy. They differ fundamentally, inasmuch as fight involves a tendency to destruction of the object fought against, while in the ridiculous or the comic the tendency to destruction must, even in malicious laughter, be kept in the background, and in most cases must be completely absent from the consciousness of the audience. As Aristotle has pointed out long ago, "the ridiculous is a certain error and turpitude unattended with pain and destruction."

CHAPTER IX

FREEDOM AND LAUGHTER

We have pointed out that laughter and ridicule and their various species deal with free, unimpeded activity. When activity is impeded, forced, constrained, and a relief sets in, we have an outburst of accumulated energy held in restraint, and the result is play, joy, with its psychomotor manifestations of smiles and laughter. From this point of view we may say that relief from constraint of the cares and serious work forced on us by the conditions of life and struggle for existence is an outlet for energy which, instead of going on useful work, for a definite purpose of life, flows out and is transformed into play, joy, laughter—the enjoyment of the ridiculous and the comic. May we not agree with those writers who regard laughter and the comic as the outcome of relief from constraints of the drudgeries and monotony of life, as relaxation from all the worries which business and cares of life carry with them? The child freed from school is released from bondage, the energy kept in constraint by the teacher, work and study, becomes unobstructed, the attention kept in a state of tension and concentration gets emancipated from restraints; there is a feeling of relief—the inner energies are free, unimpeded. The result is the feeling of joy with the consequent jumping, running, leaping, and boisterous laughter.

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When the business man or the student wishes to get free from his cares, drudgery, and seriousness of work he resorts to games and plays which give the needed relaxation. The games, the theaters with their comic plays, places of amusement, clubs with their mirth, jokes, jests and anecdotes smooth out the cares, the crow's feet, the wrinkles on the brow of many a worker whose occupation is either monotonous or full of earnestness, of seriousness, effort and concentration of attention. Like school boys and school girls, men of the factory, the office, the shop and the store become free agents and are no longer hindered and cramped by rule and regulation of business and trade. Free scope is given to their cramped state of mental activity. Relaxation from constraint gives rise to free unimpeded activity; hence joy and laughter. Relaxation goes with free activity.

The ridiculous and the comic have within them this aspect of relaxation. The mind feels soothed and relaxed by the comic, the joke, the pun, the anecdote, the amusing story, and the fable. There is a release from pressure of limitations, conditions, regulations, and efforts of conforming oneself to and squeezing one's individuality into a definite frame. When the consciousness of such effort is gone, there is relief, and the feeling of relaxation is present.

We can compare the comic and laughter with rest. In fact, we may go further and compare laughter with sleep; not with the sleep in which the senses and consciousness are inactive, but with the sleep state in which mental activities are present. May we not compare the ludicrous with the dream? The dream occurs during the rest state, during sleep. And what is sleep but a release from all the troubles and trammels of waking life?

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In my work on "Sleep" I have shown that "we go to sleep when we relinquish our hold on the relations of our external environment. We fall asleep when our consciousness is fagged, when we wish no longer to enter into communication with the external world, when we lose interest in our surroundings. When our interest in external existence fags and fades away we go to sleep. When our interests in the external world cease we draw up the bridges, so to say, interrupt all external communication, as far as it is possible, and become isolated in our own fortress. We repair to our own world of organic activity and inner dream life. We fall asleep when the vital interests in external being have fallen into the background; we awake when those interests are aroused. When the struggle for existence ceases we repair to our castle and battlements.

"Sleep is the interruption of our intercourse with the external world; it is the laying down of our arms for a respite in the struggle of life. Sleep is a truce with the world. When all psychomotor reactions to the stimuli of external environment cease we sleep. We sleep because we are no longer interested to take an active part in the battle of life. From a teleological standpoint we may say that sleep is a dismissal of the external world with all its vicissitudes, troubles, and pains. We cease to desire, we cease to react, and we sleep and dream in peace." As Heraclitus puts it: "Those who are awake have one world in common; those who are asleep retire every one to a private world of his own."

We have further shown that sleep is brought about "by a mass of impressions possessing little or no variability, by limitations, or by relative withdrawal of stimulations, or, what is the same, by monotony of stimula-

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tions and by limitations of voluntary movements." The thresholds in regard to stimuli coming from the external environment are raised, that is—it becomes more and more difficult for external stimuli to reach consciousness; the person, or the animal falls into sleep. The hold on external life is gone, there is complete relaxation, both physical and mental. The sleeper reacts neither with muscle, nor with sense, nor with intellect to the various impressions that come crowding on him from all sides. The hold on external life is relinquished and the state is one of passivity and relaxation.

The sudden release or relief from a great strain is apt to make people laugh at the least occasion. In wars and forced marches where there are great strain and danger soldiers have been known to laugh at the most trivial accident and remark. In school, in the lecture room, in court, in the popular assembly, in church any trivial incident calls forth laughter. The more dignified the surroundings are, the more solemn the circumstances, the more will the trivial appeal to us as ridiculous. On such occasions the mind is tuned to the serious, and there is a subexcitement of potential, subconscious, reserve energy which is stimulated to life in order to respond to the occasion. When the trivial appears the strain of the immense amount of subexcited, subconscious, nervous energy is relieved, the amount of energy overflows the smaller muscles of the face and of respiration, the tension is relieved, and the result is laughter. This is akin to Spencer's view of laughter that it is the relief of a strain, and also to that of Kant, who maintains that "Laughter is the result of expectation which suddenly ends in nothing." We may lay it down as a law that *relief from a great strain is an important aid to laughter.*

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That is why often a flat remark made by a dull school-master or by a heavy-witted professor in the college room excites laughter—it is the relief from the strain of the schoolroom.

Similarly a trifling incident in a church, such as the bark of a dog or the sneeze of the minister or of one of the congregation in the middle of a solemn hymn, excites smiles and laughter. There is the contrast of the solemn and the insignificant, the superior and the inferior, the excellent and the base. There is relief from a strenuous state and release of subconscious energy adjusted and tuned to a high occasion, energy no longer needed, now spent in free activity of joy, overflowing the small, delicate muscles of face and respiration, and manifested as smiles and laughter. A situation that brings about relief of a psycho-physiological state of high tension appears as contrast giving rise to laughter and the ludicrous. We may, therefore, lay it down as a law that *the significant and the insignificant, the noble and the ignoble, the grave and the gay, the heroic and the grotesque, the unusual and the usual, the superior and the inferior, when juxtaposed, raise laughter.*

In the ludicrous and the comic we let go the earnestness, the seriousness of life; we get free from the limitations and the harassing hindrances of the external world—business, work, trade is forgotten. The monotony of the humdrum routine of life is left behind. When we are no longer in contact with the actual facts, as far as our interests are concerned, we are let loose from all rules, laws, regulations, manners, and customs to which we have to conform. We rise above the requirements of life. With an activity unimpeded by the conditions of the external environment, unclogged by the

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hard, material facts of daily life, we are freed from the bondage of authority and control. The external world with its hard, unwieldy realities no longer troubles us. We become free agents. We soar in the air of spiritual freedom, ease, grace, and power of superabundance of energy. We bask in the light and the warmth of the joyous, smiling ethereal energy radiating from the depths of our spirit. We laugh as we watch the sparkle, the rainbow colors, the kaleidoscopic display of rising and bursting of resplendent bubbles playing above the ocean of life.

In comedy and laughter there is a letting go of the realities of life; there is present a relaxation from the persistent concentration on the problems which life sets before us; there is relief from the seriousness, irksomeness, and grinding demanded by the authoritative, despotic decrees of the autocracy of the external environment; there is a liberation from the limiting, controlling, regulating social surroundings. We spin and weave airy webs out of severe, inflexible realities, and destroy them like soap bubbles, like gossamer and cobweb, with a smile and a laugh. We take liberties with stern realities, circumvent them, transcend them, play with them, and laugh at them. As in a dream, or, rather, in a day reverie, we are no longer at the mercy of the external world. We spin the yarn or web of life as fancy and caprice please. In this respect the play of the comic and the life of dream and reverie are alike.

There is, however, an important difference between the comic and the dream. The dream is an inconsistent rambling due to the lagging, sluggishness, and gradual loss of tenacity of mental power; it is like the tottering walk, the incoherent speech and thought of the drunkard.

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The dream is a fanciful weaving of the mind due to mental paralysis and dissociation of consciousness. Dreams and reveries are due to the feeble grasp on the shuttle of active waking life. The comic, however, may even have a firmer hold on reality than waking life; it may display a wider view and deeper understanding of the complications and snarls presented to us by external surroundings. In the comic as in art we let our fancy work untrammelled by hard reality and oppressive social life. Our fancy works with greater and freer ease and energy than it does in the monotony of the tasks set to us by our daily occupations requisite for the maintenance of life. The sordid requirements of life no longer concern us. We enjoy the life of the free. Like the gods on Olympus, we laugh from the very joy of the sense of freedom. Laughter is born of surcharge of power, of superabundance of energy.

When there is manifestation of reserve energy where none has been expected then laughter comes to the foreground. We laugh the triumphant, jubilant laughter when ease, facility, dexterity, and grace emerge out of difficulty, awkwardness, and perplexity. The sense of the ridiculous, on the contrary, appears, when awkwardness, perplexity, and uneasiness arise where ease and facility are expected. We laugh from surcharge of energy, and we laugh from the opposite state in cases where such energy is found wanting. *We laugh from strength and we laugh at weakness.* Laughter arises from the sense of freedom of mental activities. We laugh from consciousness of our superior power when we see the weakness of the inferior.

When there is actual delight in the inferiority, in the humiliation of another person, ridicule passes into the

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lower forms of sneering, sarcasm, scoffing, and jeering. The obscene and scurrilous joke belongs also to the lower forms of mental activities, inasmuch as the obscene takes delight in the humiliation of the person ridiculed, stimulates the sexual instinct, and arouses sexual energy. Many such obscene jokes are found in Shakespeare, especially in his comedy, "Measure for Measure," the plot of which is laid in Vienna, full of vice, licentiousness, lewdry, and bawdry, the very city in which Freud, by the irony of fate, centuries afterward, developed his "scientific" sexual theories. However the case may be, it remains true that *laughter arises from the consciousness of our superiority.*

CHAPTER X

THE LUDICROUS AND THE INFERIOR

The sense of the ridiculous, taking its origin in laughter at what is regarded as weakness and defects, may develop in its gradual transformation, as it is becoming more and more complex with the growth of personality and individuality. When we pierce the illusions of life which are maintained with the whole force of religious and social sanctions, we laugh and see the ridiculous in the unreality of social relations. We laugh at what is regarded as all-important reality. We laugh at illusions which are taken seriously as realities. The requirements of social conventionalities impose illusions on us which we regard as realities, which are worshiped as idols and divinities. The disillusionment with social life played as with stern reality is the domain of the comic in the higher sphere of human culture. Beginning with the child that makes merry at the game of imitation and make-believe, and ending with Aristophanes, Lucian, Voltaire, and Molière, who laugh and make the observers roar at the make-believe of the play of adults in social, political, religious, and family life, we find the same state of laughter at disillusionment of what is regarded as stern reality. *We laugh at the real unreality or unreal reality.* To quote from Schopenhauer :

Oh, for some Asmodeus of morality, to make not only roofs and walls transparent to his favorites, but also to lift

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the veil of dissimulation, fraud, hypocrisy, pretence, falsehood and deception, which is spread over all things! To show how little true honesty there is in the world, and how often, even where it is least to be expected, behind all the exterior outwork of virtue, secretly and in the innermost recesses, unrighteousness sits at the helm! It is just on this account that so many men of the better kind have four-footed friends: for, to be sure, how is a man to get relief from the endless dissimulation, falsity and malice of mankind, if there were no dogs into whose honest faces he could look without distrust?

For what is our civilized world but a big masquerade? where you meet knights, priests, soldiers, men of learning, barristers, clergymen, philosophers, and I don't know what all! But they are not what they pretend to be; they are only masks, and, as a rule, behind the masks you will find money-makers. One man, I suppose, puts on the mask of law, which he has borrowed for the purpose from a barrister, only in order to be able to give another man a sound drubbing; a second has chosen the mask of patriotism and the public welfare with a similar intent; a third takes religion or purity of doctrine. For all sorts of purposes, men have often put on the mask of philosophy, and even of philanthropy, and I know not what besides. Women have a smaller choice. As a rule they avail themselves of the mask of morality, modesty, domesticity, and humility. Then there are general masks, without any particular character attaching to them, like dominoes. They may be met with anywhere; and of this sort are the strict rectitude, the courtesy, the sincere sympathy, the smiling friendship, that people profess. The whole of these masks as a rule are merely, as I have said, a disguise for some industry, commerce, or speculation.

It is necessary that a man should be apprised early in life that it is a masquerade in which he finds himself. For otherwise there are many things which he will fail to

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understand and put up with, nay, at which he will be completely puzzled, and that man longest of all whose heart is made of better clay. Such, for instance, is the favor that villainy finds; the neglect that merit, even the rarest and the greatest, suffers at the hands of those of the same profession; the hatred of truth and great capacity; the ignorance of scholars in their own province; and the fact that true wares are almost always despised and the merely specious ones in request. Therefore let even the young be instructed betimes that in this masquerade the apples are of wax, the flowers of silk, the fish of pasteboard, and that all things—yes, all things—are toys and trifles; and that of two men whom he may see earnestly engaged in business, one is supplying spurious goods and the other paying for them in false coin.

We have seen that the comic deals with disillusionment of what is regarded as stern reality, with disenchantment of the false glories of life, with the bringing down of the sham superior to the level of the inferior, with the revelation of defects where dignity and perfection were believed to exist. The school boy makes game of his master, and the subject finds amusement in the anecdotes about the king, the monarch, and the autocrat. The higher, the more dignified and commanding the personages, the greater the comic effect when ridicule is directed against them. The high are humbled, their greatness is shown to be a snare and delusion. This brings us face to face with the most essential and characteristic of human failings which often form the theme of the ridiculous, namely, *conceit, simulation, and vanity*. As Schopenhauer tersely puts it: "Nothing is of greater moment to man than the gratification of his vanity, and no wound is more painful than that which is inflicted on it."

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There are people who are so intensely subjective, so morbidly introspective, that their only interest and attention are concentrated on themselves. "They always think," says Schopenhauer, "of their own case as soon as any remark is made. Their whole attention is engrossed and absorbed by the merest chance reference which appears to affect them personally, be it never so remote. The outcome is that they are totally unable of forming any true objective view of things. They cannot admit any validity in arguments which tell against their interests or their vanity. They are so touchy, so readily offended, insulted or annoyed that no matter how impersonal the matter of discussion may be you must be extremely careful of your remarks which may possibly hurt the tender feelings of those worthy and sensitive individuals. . . . Fine, subtle and witty sayings as well as true and striking observations are lost upon them. But they are most tenderly sensitive to anything that may in the slightest way disturb their petty vanity or may reflect prejudicially in the most remote and indirect way on their exceedingly precious selves. They resemble the little dog upon whose toes you are apt to tread inadvertently; you know it by the shrill bark the little cur sets up; they resemble the sick man covered with wounds and boils who must be handled with great care."

In vanity the person displays before others external advantages, such as wealth, titles, nobility, office, or some other external possessions by which he wishes to indicate his superiority over his fellows. In conceit the person claims to be of superior nature, having some artistic, intellectual, moral, and physical virtues not possessed by his fellow beings; his superiority is one of personality, of body, of mind, or of both. In his comedy, "Much

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Ado About Nothing," Shakespeare plays with vanity and conceit as manifested in the characters of *Beatrice* and *Benedict*.

The noble and the ignoble, the superior and the inferior, the rational and the irrational are common constituents of the ludicrous. They may be contrasted in different persons, or they may be found in the same person. The abnormal hides in the superior or the normal, the noble or rational covers or disguises the ignoble and irrational. When such a relation is discovered the effect is invariably ludicrous. *The discovery of the contrast relation of superior and inferior constitutes the art of the comic and the power of ridicule.*

The force of irony consists just in the fact that the inferior is described in terms of the superior. Ambiguity of words and of thought is often used to that effect. The normal, supernormal, or the superior is spoken of, while the underlying suggestion is inferiority. The effect is greater the closer the inferior is made to resemble the superior. Irony is a form of dramatic act—*the inferior is made to mimic the superior*. The more successfully the mimicking is carried through, the more closely the copy resembles the original, so that the two are confused and one is taken for the other, the greater the success of the irony as a form of ridicule.

Irony reaches its climax of success when the original itself takes the mimicked copy of the superior with all the indirect suggestions of inferiority as a flattering picture of itself, or rather of what it intends to appear and is not.

The meaning of irony is *dissemblance*, and dissembling is the force of irony. We disapprove and condemn under the form of regard, respect and praise. Irony

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kills with faint praise. Irony is essentially dissemblance. We convey by it the very reverse of what we say. We say great when we mean small; good when we mean evil; success when we mean failure; wise when we mean silly and stupid. We feign to think as the original thinks of himself. The more closely the ideal conception of the original is imitated, so that the original takes it as a true imitation of his ideal self, the more effective is the force of the irony. The bystanders or the audience are supposed to know all the while in what direction the shafts of ridicule are thrown. *The more unconscious the butt of irony is, the more successful is the irony and the greater is the force of ridicule.*

And now, when we come to think about it, may we not regard irony and the comic as forms of reaction to the dissemblance, subconscious or conscious, of the original—a dissemblance, whether hypocritical or naïve, in which the original presents himself as a true and actual incarnation of the ideal? Irony reacts to semblance by a conscious dissemblance in which the original is exposed in its true nature to the public gaze. *Irony counteracts semblance by dissemblance.*

There is nothing so effective against vanity, the quintessence of all human infirmities and faults, as irony. It gives the hypocrite and the vain the praise and the glory which they crave and adds the sting of showing their utter worthlessness:

The qualities three that in a bee we meet—

In the ironical never should fail—

The body should always be active and sweet,

And the sting should be left in the tail.

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In all comic the climax must be present. The climax is that which clinches the train of thought and at the same time gives the final sting. In irony, however, the poison of the sting runs like an undercurrent through the body of thought; it may come out suddenly with a lash and sting and once more plunge and disappear below the surface. This sudden coming to the surface in the form of a climax, leaving its sting and disappearing below the surface, out of sight, is characteristic of irony.

Excellent examples may be found in the delicate Socratic irony. To quote from Plato's "Dialogues":

I should like to know what you think about another definition of temperance, which I just now remember to have heard from someone, who said that "temperance is doing our own business." Was he right who affirmed that?

You young monster! I said; this is what Critias, or some philosopher, has told you.

Someone else, then, said Critias; for certainly I have not.

But what matter, said Charmides, from whom I heard this?

No matter at all, I replied; for the point is not who said the words, but whether they are true or not . . .

Then, as I was just now saying, he who declared that temperance is a man doing his own business had another and a hidden meaning; for I do not think that he could have been such a fool as to mean this. Was he a fool who told you, Charmides?

Nay, he replied, I certainly thought him a very wise man.

Then I am quite certain that he put forth his definition as a riddle, thinking that no one would know the meaning of the words "doing his own business."

I dare say, he replied.

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And what is the meaning of a man doing his own business? Can you tell me?

Indeed, I cannot; and I should not wonder if the man himself who used this phrase did not understand what he was saying. Whereupon he laughed slyly and looked at Critias.

Critias had long been showing uneasiness, for he felt that he had a reputation to maintain with Charmides and the rest of the company. He had, however, hitherto managed to restrain himself; but now he could no longer forbear, and I am convinced of the truth of the suspicion which I entertained at the time, that Charmides had heard this answer about temperance from Critias. And Charmides, who did not want to answer himself, but to make Critias answer, tried to stir him up. He went on pointing out that he had been refuted, at which Critias grew angry, and appeared, as I thought, inclined to quarrel with him; just as a poet might quarrel with an actor who spoiled his poems in repeating them. . . .

In another of his "Dialogues" Plato ridicules the Sophists:

And you and your brother, Dionysodorus, I said, of all men who are now living are the most likely to stimulate him to philosophy and to the study of virtue.

Yes, Socrates, I rather think that we are.

Then I wish that you would be good enough to defer the other part of the exhibition, and only try to persuade the youth whom you see here that he ought to be a philosopher and study virtue. Exhibit that, and you will confer a great favor on me and on every one present; for the fact is I and all of us are extremely anxious that he should become truly good. His name is Clenias, and he is the son of Axiochus, and grandson of the old Alcibiades, cousin of the Alcibiades that now is. He is quite young,

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and we are naturally afraid that someone may get the start of us, and turn his mind in a wrong direction, and he may be ruined. Your visit, therefore, is most happily timed; and I hope that you will make a trial of the young man, and converse with him in our presence, if you have no objections.

These were pretty nearly the expressions which I used; and Euthydemus, in a manly and at the same time encouraging tone, replied: There can be no objection, Socrates, if the young man is only willing to answer questions.

He is quite accustomed to do so, I replied; for his friends often come and ask him questions and argue with him; and therefore he is quite at home in answering.

What followed, Crito, how can I rightly narrate? For not slight is the task of rehearsing infinite wisdom, and therefore, like the poets, I ought to commence my relation with an invocation to the Memory and the Muses. Now Euthydemus, if I remember rightly, began nearly as follows: O Clenias, are those who learn the wise or the ignorant?

The youth, overpowered by the question, blushed, and in his perplexity looked at me for help; and I, knowing that he was disconcerted, said: Take courage, Clenias, and answer like a man whichever you think; for my belief is that you will derive the greatest benefit from their questions.

Whichever he answers, said Dionysodorus, leaning forward so as to catch my ear, his face beaming with laughter, I prophesy that he will be refuted, Socrates. . . .

At these words the followers of Euthydemus, of whom I spoke, like a chorus at the bidding of their director, laughed and cheered. Then before the youth had time to recover his breath, Dionysodorus cleverly took him in hand, and said: Yes, Clenias; and when the grammar-master dictated anything to you, were they the wise boys or the unlearned who learned the dictation?

The wise, replied Clenias.

Then after all the wise are the learners and not the unlearned; and your last answer to Euthydemus was wrong.

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Then once more the admirers of the two heroes, in an ecstasy at their wisdom, gave vent to another peal of laughter, while the rest of us were silent and amazed. Euthydemus, observing this, determined to persevere with the youth; and in order to heighten the effect went on asking another similar question, which might be compared to the double turn of an expert dancer. Do those, said he, who learn learn what they know, or what they do not know? . . .

The word was hardly out of his mouth when Dionysodorus took up the argument, like a ball which he caught, and had another throw at the youth. Clenias, he said, Euthydemus is deceiving you. For tell me now, is not learning acquiring knowledge of that which one learns?

Euthydemus was proceeding to give the youth a third fall; but I knew that he was in deep water, and therefore, as I wanted to give him a respite lest he should be disheartened, I said to him consolingly: You must not be surprised, Clenias, at the singularity of their mode of speech: this I say because you may not understand what the two strangers are doing with you; they are only initiating you after the manner of the Corybantes in the mysteries; and this answers to the enthronement, which, if you have ever been initiated, is, as you will know, accompanied by dancing and sport; and now they are just dancing and prancing about you, and will next proceed to initiate you; imagine then that you have gone through the first part of the sophistical ritual, which, as Prodicus says, begins with initiation into the correct use of terms.

And now, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, I think that we have had enough of this. Will you let me see you explaining to the young man how he is to apply himself to the study of virtue and wisdom? And I will first show you what I conceive to be the nature of the task, and what sort of a discourse I desire to hear; and if I do this in a

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very inartistic and ridiculous manner, do not laugh at me, for I only venture to improvise before you, because I am eager to hear your wisdom: and I must therefore ask you and your disciples to refrain from laughing.

This is in the vein of the subtle Socratic irony.

A few specimens of biting irony passing into sarcasm in which the lash of ridicule is more evident may be taken from the writings of Pascal:

The mind of the greatest man in the world is not so independent of circumstances as to prevent his being disturbed by the most insignificant noise. The report of a cannon is not requisite to break the chain of his thoughts; the creaking of a weather-cock or of a pulley will suffice. Why should you be surprised that he cannot reason well just now? How, let me ask, is he to put his thoughts together, as long as that fly is buzzing about his ears? If you wish him to find out the truth, pray drive away the insect that holds his reason in check, and disturbs that powerful understanding which governs cities and kingdoms.

Why do you murder me? A strange question! Do you not live on the other side of the water? If you lived on this side, my good Sir, I should indeed be an assassin for killing you; but you live on the other side: I am acting, therefore, like a man of honor, and everything is as it should be.

Cromwell was on the point of overturning all Christendom; the royal family would have been ruined, and his own permanently established, if a small piece of gravel had not lodged in his ureter. Rome herself was ready to tremble before him, but this small grain, of no consequence elsewhere, stopping in this particular part, he dies, his family are reduced, and the king is restored.

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Pascal ridicules the importance of human affairs and the greatness of historical events :

Whoever would fully measure the vanity of human life must consider the causes and the effects of the passion of love. If the nose of Cleopatra had been shorter the whole face of the earth would have been different.

There is not only a slight on the royal personages playing such important rôles in historical life of mankind, but also on the assumed importance of the historical events themselves. The ridicule is brought about by the play on the nose of Cleopatra and the face of the earth.

We may quote from Schopenhauer a few caustic remarks in which irony throws off its disguise and the chastisement of ridicule appears in full force, passing into strong, frank, blunt satire.

Should your opponent expressly challenge you to produce any objection to some definite point in his argument, and you have nothing much to say, you must try to give the matter a general turn, and then talk against that. If you are called upon to say why a particular physical hypothesis cannot be accepted, you may speak of the infallibility of human knowledge, and give various illustrations of it.

If you know that you have no reply to the arguments which your opponent advances, you may, by a fine stroke of irony, declare yourself to be an incompetent judge: "What you now say passes my poor powers of comprehension; it may be all very true, but I can't understand it, and I refrain from any expression of opinion on it." In this way you insinuate to the bystanders, with whom you are in good repute, that what your opponent says is nonsense.

When we come to look into the matter, so-called universal opinion is the opinion of two or three persons.

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Goethe says somewhere that man is not without a vein of veneration. To satisfy this impulse to venerate, even in those who have no sense for what is really worthy, substitutes are provided in the shape of princes and princely families, nobles, titles, orders, and money-bags.

As a specimen of irony on American bigotry and religious revivalism we may take the following sermon:

X I may say to you, my brethring, that I am not an edicated man an' I am not one of them as believes that edication is necessary for a gospel minister, for I believe the Lord edicates his preachers jest as he wants 'em to be edicated: an' although I say it that oughtn't to say it, yet in the state of Indianny, whar I live, thar's no man as gits bigger congregations nor what I gits.

Thar may be some here to-day, my brethring, as don't know what persuasion I am uv. Well I must say to you, my brethring, that I'm a Hard Shell Baptist. Thar's some folks as don't like the Hard Shell Baptists, but I'd rather have a hard shell as no shell at all. You see me here to-day, my brethring, dressed up in fine clothes; you mout think I was proud, my brethring, and although I've been a preacher of the gospel for twenty years an' although I'm capting of the flatboat that lies at your landing I'm not proud, my brethring.

I am not gwine to tell edzactly whar my tex may be found; suffice to say, it's in the leds of the Bible, and you'll find it somewhar between the first chapter of the book of Generations and the last chapter of the book of Revolutions, and ef you'll go and search the Scriptures, you'll not only find my tex thar, but a great many other texes as will do you good to read, and my tex, when you shill find it, you shill find it to read thus:

"And he played on a harp uv a *thousand* strings—sperits uv jest men made perfeck."

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My tex, my brethring, leads me to speak of sperits. Now, thar's a great many kinds of sperits in the world—in the fuss place, thar's the sperits as some folks call ghosts, and thar's the sperits uv turpentine, and thar's the sperits as some folks call liquor, an' I've got as good an artikel of them kind of sperits on my flatboat as ever was fotch down the Mississippi River; but thar's a great many other kinds of sperits, for the tex says, "He played on a harp uv a *t-h-o-u-s-and* strings, sperits uv jest men made perfeck."

But I'll tell you the kind uv sperits as is ment in the tex, is fire. That's the kind uv sperits as is ment in the tex, my brethring. Now thar's a great many kinds of fire in the world. In the fuss place thar's the common kind of fire you light your cigar or pipe with, and then thar's foxfire and campfire, fire before you're ready, and fire and fall back, and many other kinds uv fire, for the tex says, "He played on the harp of a *thousand* strings, sperits uv jest men made perfeck."

But I'll tell you the kind of fire as is ment in the tex, my brethring—it's Hell Fire! an' that's the kind uv fire as a great many uv you'll come to, ef you don't do better nor what you have been doin'—for "He played on a harp uv a *thousand* strings, sperits uv jest men made perfeck."

Now, the different sorts of fire in the world may be likened unto the different persuasions of the Christians in the world. In the first place we have the Piscapalions, an' they are a high sailin' and high-falutin' set, and they may be likened unto a turkey buzzard, that flies up into the air, and he goes up, and up, and up, till he looks no bigger than your finger nail, and the fust thing you know, he cums down, and is a fillin' himself on the carkiss of a dead hoss by the side of the road and "He played on a harp uv a *thousand* strings, sperits uv jest men made perfeck."

And then thar's the Methodis, and they may be likened unto the squirril runnin' up into a tree, for the Methodis beleeves in gwine on from one degree to another, and finally

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on to perfection, and the squirrel goes up and up, and up and up, and he jumps from limb to limb, and branch to branch, and the fust thing you know he falls, and down he cums kerflumix, and that's like the Methodis, for they is allers fallen from grace, ah! and "He played on a harp uv a *thousand* strings, sperits uv jest men made perfeck."

And then, my brethring, thar's the Baptist, ah! and they have been likened unto a possum on a 'simmon tree, and thenders may roll and the earth may quake, but that possum clings thar still, ah! and you may shake one foot loose, and the other's thar, and you may shake all feet loose, and he laps his tail around the limb, and clings and he clings furever, for "He played on the harp uv a *thousand* strings, sperits uv jest men made perfeck."

This close imitation of the conceit, vanity, ignorance, and stupidity of itinerant preachers is an excellent irony on the type of sermons delivered at American religious camps and revival meetings.

Another example of irony keyed to a higher pitch may be taken from Swift's immortal "Gulliver's Travels":

The emperors of Blefuscu did frequently expostulate by their ambassadors, accusing us of making a schism in religion, by offending against a fundamental doctrine of our great prophet Lustrog in the fifty-fourth chapter of the Blundecral (which is their Al-Koran). This, however, is thought to be a mere strain upon the text; for the words are these: that all true believers shall break their eggs at the convenient end.

This bit of irony on the stupid trivialities of religious dogmas is a stroke of genius.

CHAPTER XI

VANITY AND THE PRINCIPLES OF RIDICULE

In vanity, conceit, and excessive pride generally superior qualities, virtues, and merits are claimed by the persons affected by such mental states. Such persons act as superiors in regard to other people who have as yet to find out whether such superiority is real, and whether there is any substance to it, or whether it is all but a shadow. The very doubt that arises in the mind of the beholder as to the reality of such claims and, therefore, appropriateness of such behavior predisposes to the possibility of ridicule. The claims of superiority may turn out to be but a false idea, a sort of delusion. The person affected by illusory claims shows weakness, defects. He is regarded as living below the normal, thus becoming an object of ridicule.

Persons that claim superiority must also meet with a response, inasmuch as the superiority is related to a state of inferiority in other people. Now few would care to be subject to a state of inferiority, unless there is sufficient cause and reason. Wherever, therefore, claims of superiority are put forward there is a possibility for laughter and derision. This is especially true in the case of vanity. The vain person is anxious for the approval and recognition of his superiority by his neighbor. As soon, however, as the neighbor becomes aware of the fact that his recognition is looked for he immediately

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feels his superiority over the vain person. The tables are thus turned and the subject of vanity becomes an object of ridicule.

Conceit and pride have an exaggerated ego for their foundation. The self-complacency, the extreme selfishness, and often the disregard of other persons' wishes, desires, sufferings, and aspirations deprive the vain of all sympathy, and hence they become fit objects of the comic wit who can see through the hollowness of their claims. The vain and conceited are greedy for other people's opinions and praise. No sooner is this dependence discovered than they become the playthings of their neighbors' game. The neighbors become conscious that all these proud and vain peacocks display ostentatiously their gorgeous tails for the edification and amusement of their acquaintances. The vain and the conceited become dependent on those whom they regard as inferior and fall below the level of the very people whom they affect to despise—they are humiliated by their would-be inferiors—the game is turned against them.

As soon as the inferiors refuse to acknowledge themselves as being on a lower level, as soon as they refuse to bow before the alleged superiority, and repudiate all claims of illusive paramount excellence, as soon as the vain person is not recognized and even regarded as supercilious, he who struts about in a self-devised cloak of honor, in a cloud of glory, becomes an object of derision, jest, and ridicule. That is why all ceremonies, solemnities, manners, and mannerisms whether of church, state, office, title, rank, sect, class, or caste become vulnerable as soon as their vain pomposity is exhibited to the view of the people whom they wish to cast under the spell of their superior charms, virtues, and merits. The charm is dis-

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pelled by a joke and a laugh. The delusions of grandeur and conceit are dispersed by rays of smiles and laughter.

The comic effects become more intensified by the fact that, although vanity, conceit, and pride, with their mannerisms and ceremonies, are consciously displayed for the benefit of the external observers so as to obtain their admiration and thus make them feel their inferior position, there is another side to it, namely, the unconsciousness of the attitude taken by the actors in the play. The people, after all, may not be impressed by the superior airs and may regard the whole situation as a form of horse play.

The vain person is not conscious of his vanity and does not realize that other people see through his motives and understand the pettiness of his condition and dependence of his position on the good will of his neighbor. The selfishness and self-glorification of the conceited and proud man prevent him from understanding his supposed inferiors and exclude him from sympathy with the lives and motives of his fellow men. This lack of understanding and sympathy produces not only an antagonism, but also a lack of comprehension of the feelings and effects of the esteem and respect after which the vain and conceited so ardently strive. Hence many of their actions appear in the eyes of the outside world as lacking in adjustment to circumstances. Their striking attitudes are regarded as inferior and are met with laughter and ridicule.

The governing classes in plutocratic societies are specially apt to be affected by the malady of vanity and conceit. The purse-proud parvenu is, therefore, an inexhaustible theme for the comic writer. Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* gives an excellent description of the rich upstart,

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a psychological description which furnishes the reason why the rich man is exposed to ridicule.

Anyone, without any great penetration, may distinguish the disposition consequent on wealth; for (its possessors) are insolent and overbearing, from being tainted in a certain way by the getting of their wealth. For they are affected as though they possessed every good; since wealth is a sort of standard of the worth of other things; whence everything seems to be purchasable by it. And they are affectedly delicate and purse-proud; they are thus delicate on account of their luxurious lives, and the display they make of their prosperity. They are purse-proud, and violate the rules of good breeding, from the circumstance that every one is wont to dwell upon that which is beloved and admired by him, and because they think that others are emulous of that, of which they are themselves. But at the same time they are thus affected reasonably enough; for many are they who need the aid of men of property. Whence, too, that remark of Simonides addressed to the wife of Hiero respecting the wealthy and wise; for when she asked him, "whether it were better to have been born wealthy or wise," he replied "wealthy; for," he said, "he used to see the wise hanging on at the doors of the wealthy." And (it is a characteristic of the rich) that they esteem themselves worthy of being in office; for they consider themselves possessed of that on account of which they are entitled to be in office. And, in a word, the disposition of the rich is that of a fool amid prosperity.

The unconsciousness of their shallowness, vacancy, and frivolity makes the vain and conceited persons specially weak in the eyes of their neighbors. Faults and defects are unconsciously displayed for the amusement of the world. What makes their condition all the lower and hence more ludicrous is the fact that the very defects

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are paraded as virtues of which the possessors are so conceitedly proud. The weakness and the inferiority become all the more prominent as the vain person remains under the illusion that the neighbor takes his weakness for strength and his defects for excelling virtues. This illusion of his belief in his own strength, and the delusion that his neighbor is under the same illusion, make the position of the vain and conceited person all the more ludicrous. One cannot help agreeing with Schopenhauer :

The only genuine superiority is that of the mind and character; all other kinds are fictitious, affected, false; and it is good to make them feel that it is so, when they try to show off before the superiority that is true.

And still, while vanity, conceit, and false pride form the material of many a comical situation, and many a comic writer has utilized these failings of human nature as subjects for his work, these states are by no means the only factors that call down ridicule upon their possessors. They are the streams that come from the source of all human ridicule—the inner inferiority of what is regarded as superior and excellent, and the recognition of the unreality of what is believed as an excelling form of reality. However the case may be, it remains true that *play with the realities of life, now regarding the realities as illusions, now detecting the illusions regarded as realities and making merry over them and rising superior to them, will ever remain the subject of the comic. To laugh at the infirmities of human nature, to prick social, moral, religious, and family bubbles and see them explode will ever remain the joy and the essence of the ludicrous.* The comic in all ages and in all societies, as

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well as in all stages of human development, will always consist in the play with the apparently contrasting, contradictory combinations of the superior and inferior, the real and the unreal, the actual and the illusory.

This brings out another important element in the play of the ridiculous. We do not laugh at material, inanimate objects, inasmuch as we cannot find there any superiority or inferiority. We rarely laugh at landscapes, or at scenery, or at material objects in general. Wherever we find such laughter we always discover that we presuppose some agency behind the ludicrous. We may laugh at some illusions made for us by somebody or by some tricks of sleight of hand, but they all represent the work or presence of some human activity. We may laugh at some animal and its tricks. This is brought about by our imagining the presence of some human agency.

We may laugh at animals transformed by artificial human taste and the deformities brought about in them under the belief of a greater improvement and enhancement of the beautiful. We may laugh at animals when we imagine something working in them similar to the human spirit. This is done only in so far as we humanize them and demand of the brute creation a certain standard. We laugh at the tricks of a pig, of a horse, of an elephant, or of a monkey, because we can easily imagine them to come near the individuality of man.

Again, an animal in an unnatural position or when put under some unusual conditions making it look clumsy, awkward, and below the ease and freedom of adjustment characteristic of the species will be regarded as ridiculous. Thus a dog drinking beer and becoming unsteady and frisky, pigs eating decayed grapes and be-

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coming intoxicated and wobbly on their legs remind one of the maladjustments of a drunkard and are objects of laughter. People may have a fit of uproarious laughter on seeing a pig with a tin can on his snout. The tin can on the hog's snout, the squealing, the helpless running about, the contortions of his whole body, all that makes the crowd roar with laughter. What is funny to the crowd is the condition of the hog, his inferior state of adjustment, his helplessness, his inability to get rid of the tin can. Such a helpless state is regarded as ludicrous because of the association, though vague and subconscious, with the ludicrousness of man under similar circumstances. Clumsiness, awkwardness, and helplessness in harmless struggle are ludicrous in man, and by *transference* are ludicrous in animals.

We may remind the reader of the ludicrousness of the man and the woman in the nursery tale which represents them with sausages sticking to their noses. In the comic the factor of personification plays an important part. *Things and objects are laughed at in proportion as they are personified and found inferior to the average accepted animal, and more especially human standard.* We may formulate the law of transference: *When objects, situations, and persons appear ridiculous, any other similar objects, situations, and persons appear ridiculous by association.* Like waves in a liquid, laughter travels and spreads by the process of transference. An animal dressed up in man's clothing appears to many people an object of laughter; a hog in a night cap is an object of ridicule. The reason is that when we see a pig dressed we think of a man reduced to the inferior place of the pig. *We get a mental picture of a hog-man.* A man seen on the street in a night cap is regarded as

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placed in an inferior position because of the unusual sight and association of the night cap with weakness, sleep, and helplessness, but a hog under such circumstances is laughed at because we think of man being ludicrous with a night cap on. The ludicrous effect is intensified as the hog emphasizes the inferiority of the situation.

Jacobs, the English humorist, brings about ludicrous effects in a story of a captain who drank away his clothes and who had to appear before his crew and the people on the deck in the garments of a woman. Even the great Shakespeare does not hesitate to utilize a similar situation to amuse his public. In his "Merry Wives of Windsor" Shakespeare puts *Falstaff* in a ludicrous position in having him escape the wrath of the husbands by dressing him in the garments of an old woman. We can well see the reason why such a situation appears ludicrous to the crowd of spectators. For, besides the fact that use and custom are against men being dressed in feminine attire, the awkwardness and clumsiness of the fit and the way the dress is handled by a man unused to it add considerably to the ludicrous effect.

Above all, however, a woman is associated in the popular mind with weakness and inferiority, and a man in woman's dress awakens associations of weakness and effeminacy. A man in a woman's dress calls up the image of a woman, and by association the image of woman forms the compound of *man-woman*, an *effeminate man*. The inferior situation of the person becomes an object of ridicule. Thus we find that the law of personification and the principle of transference play an important rôle in the creations of the comic. The ludicrous is essentially human, and by the principle of transference is carried into

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ever higher and more complex spheres and relations. *At the basis, however, of all the ludicrous we find present relations of inferiority.* A series of examples in which the inferiority of bad habits or of defective intelligence, misapprehension, ignorance, or moral baseness is pointed out will best illustrate our point:

"Well, Pat, my lad," said the kindly doctor, "you must drink this stuff. I'm afraid it's a case of kill or cure with you now, my lad."

"Well, I don't care if it kills me, so long as it cures me in the end," said Pat. "Gimme the bottle."

"What you need, madam, is oxygen. Once every afternoon for your inhalations. They will cost you \$4.00 each."

"I know that other doctor didn't understand my case," declared the fashionable patient. "He told me all I needed was plain fresh air."

An Irishman was once serving in a regiment in India. Not liking the climate, Pat tried to evolve a trick by which he could get home. Accordingly he went to the doctor and complained that his eyesight was bad. The doctor looked at him for a while and then said:

"How can you prove to me that your eyesight is bad?"

Pat looked about the room and at last said: "Well, Doctor, you see that nail on the wall?"

"Yes," replied the doctor.

"Well, then," said Pat, "I can't."

The *British Medical Journal* selects a few of the most amusing blunders made by applicants for life insurance:

Mother died in infancy.

Father went to bed feeling well and next morning woke up dead.

Applicant has never been fatally sick.

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Father died suddenly; nothing serious.

Grandfather died from gunshot wound caused by an arrow shot by an Indian.

Mother's last illness was chronic rheumatism, but she was cured before death.

Said the gentleman who had been reading birth and death statistics: "Do you know, James, that every time I breathe a man dies?"

"Then," said James, "why don't you chew cloves?"

"I don't like your heart action," the doctor said, applying the stethoscope again. "You have had some trouble with angina pectoris."

"You're partly right" said the young man, sheepishly, "only that ain't her name."

"Is the man dangerously wounded?" asked the police sergeant.

"Two of the wounds are mortal," replied the Irish surgeon, "but the third can be cured, provided the man keeps strictly quiet for at least six weeks."

An Irish traveler who loved tenderly his wife and his children once declared with enthusiasm that the best thing about going away from home was getting back again!

"Oi congratulate yez, Moik; it's a father I hear yez do be."

"Sure, an' it's two fathers Oi'm afther bein'. It's twins, b-gorry."

The following verses bring out well the relation of inferiority present in ridicule:

At a tavern one night
Messrs. More, Strange, and Wright
Met, good cheer and good thoughts to exchange.

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Says More, "Of us three
The whole town will agree
There is only one knave, and that's *Strange!*"

"Yet," says Strange, rather sore,
"I'm sure there's one *More*,
A most terrible knave, and a bite,
Who cheated his mother,
His sister, and brother."
"Oh, yes," replied More, "that is *Wright.*"

"When Mr. Casey died he left all he had to the orphan asylum."

"Indeed! That was nice of him. What did he leave?"
"His twelve children."

An Irishman gave his advice to an English friend:
"Wherever you see a head, hit it!"

A peasant, undersized but wrathful, and with his shillelagh grasped threateningly in his hand, was going about the fair asking, "Who struck Buckley? Show me the man who struck Buckley?" But when a stalwart and dangerous looking man stepped forward, saying, "'Twas I," the little peasant looked and said more quietly, "Well, after all perhaps Buckley desarved it."

"Phwat koind of a wreck wor it, Pat?" queried Larry after a railway accident.

"Th' conductor said it wor tilliscope," replied Pat.

"A tilliscope?" said Larry. "Bedad, Oi guess that's phoy Oi seen so many stars."

"Why do thim false eyes be made of glass, now?" asked Mike.

"Sure, an' how else could they say throo' 'em, ye thick-head?" answered Pat.

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"Phat a blessing it is," said Pat, "that night never comes on till late in the day, when a man is all toired out, and he could not work any more, at all, at all, even if it was morning!"

An astronomer was trying to explain to an Irishman that the earth is round but Pat would not believe it. After some discussion the astronomer said, "Now where does the sun rise?"

"In the east," said Pat.

"And where does it set?"

"Sure, in the west."

"Then how does the sun manage to get back to the east?"

Pat scratched his head for a few seconds and looked perplexed. At last his face lighted up, and he shouted triumphantly: "Sure, sir, it slips back in the dark."

"I don't know that you're the man whose name is on this check," said the bank cashier. "You'll have to be identified before I can give you the money."

"Oidentifoyed, is it?" replied Pat. "Sure, thin, cast yer eye on this bit of fotygraf, an' ye'll see that it's meself en-toirely."

"Oi'd like a job wid ye, sor," said an Irishman to a foreman in a factory.

"Well, I don't know. There isn't much doing just at present. I don't think I could keep you busy," said the foreman.

"Indade, sor," answered Pat, in a reassuring tone, "it 'ull take very little to kape me busy."

"'Tis a fine picther you have of the old man, it is," said an Irishwoman to her neighbor, who had just been left a widow.

"Isn't it?" replied the widow. "It is thot natural yez can almost hear him swear."

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The principle of blending may be pointed out here. This consists in the procedure of blending the superior and the inferior into such an inextricable mesh that the two cannot be separated. Instead of sharply contrasting the light and shade of the superior and of the inferior the two are so united that they appear to form a whole. The base and the mean are interconnected with the good and the excellent. As a matter of fact, the superior and the inferior are not entirely blended. Now the one, now the other appears to view and suddenly disappears. There is rapid kaleidoscopic change of the great and the little, of the low and the high. The law of interchange is really operative here, but in such way that there is rapid change from the high to the low and from the base to the good, so that the whole movement appears to the mental eye as one continuous whole in which the constituent elements are intimately blended. The base is expressed in terms of the pure and the noble, while the lofty and the good are debased and degraded. The whole, in order to appear ludicrous, must give the immediate impression of inferiority. In fact, in order to convey the ludicrous aspect of the whole, the suggestion of inferiority must be evident and overwhelming. The following negro sermon (by W. H. Levison) may be taken as a fair example of the workings of the law of blending in the domain of the ludicrous :

Deluded Lams, you will find my tex for dis ebenin in de Lemontations ob Solomon Moore, de Poet, when he sat down on a cold frosty nite and tort on de coldness ob his world. It am in very blank wors and reads dus :

I nebber hab

A piece of bread, nicely buttered

O're, but jis as I was a gwane

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To take a bite, it fell swat on de
Floor, and always butter side
Down.

My frens, dar's no use denieing it, dis world am a deceitful tretcherous back biting world, an sometimes I tink I will jis role up my slebes and take hold ob de but end ob it and reform it alto gedder; but den web I see how berry little progress Brudders Greely and Beecher hab made towards it, I git as sick as de monkey who eat up de segar, ob de job, and I refrain, and sing off de notion. Dis-appointment am jis as sure to follow a feller in dis life as an unpaid washwoman; and jis as you tink your prospecks am brightest, and you got ebery ting cut and dried for success in it, sumfin steps up and laffs you out ob temper, or else sets you a blubberin' in dispair, and you can no more avert it than you can coax a hungry hog from a pail ob swill by showing him a dogseartype likeness ob he granfadder. We got to take it, jis like de meezles, de small pox, and de shingles.

My frens, we can no more understand de ways ob Providence, dan a cow understands de signboards along de raleroad, warning her to "look out for de locomotif," and we heed what little we do know about as much as a bullefant wood de barking ob a whiffit pup. But some ob dese days dis whiffit, dat you disdain so much, will turn into de bullefant, and de fust ting you know he will swat you on de coconut wid he trunk and smash you down. Den, when you am prostitute on a bed ob sickness, you will turn up de wites ob you eyes, like an egg in a pot of coffee, and say, "Oh! dat I had heeded de barkin of Providence!"

The good intentions, the religious feelings, the enthusiasm and moral earnestness are all interwoven with the most inapt and inappropriate illustrations, while the whole sermon is put in a ludicrous light by the marked

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negro dialect. The sermon presents a blending of the good and the base expressed in a mean, ignoble form.

In his story "A Piece of Red Calico" Stockton presents the ludicrous character of a man who tries to match a piece of red calico for his wife. Such an insignificant affair in the eyes of an ordinary mortal is found to be accompanied with petty, insurmountable difficulties which begin to pile as the poor man keeps on chasing after his piece of calico and is finally glad to get away with anything he can obtain. Starting out with some trivial trifle the apparent insignificance grows in extensivity and intensity, expands in magnitude and dimension and finally collapses like an overblown bubble. *This is the principle of accumulation*, in fact, we may term the mechanism of this form of the jocose as the *bubble of absurdity*.

As another example of the bubble of absurdity and folly used for the manifestation of the inner character of the ludicrous may be taken the story "Our Fire-Screen" by the same writer. The lady of the house makes a pretty fire screen and the cabinetmaker constructs a fashionable frame in the Eastlake style. This frame, though stylish, is out of harmony with the rest of the furniture. Two uncomfortable chairs of the Eastlake fashion are bought to fit the frame. This in its turn is out of harmony with the other furniture. The result is that all the other furniture is sold to the brother-in-law, Tom, who keeps on laughing at the fashionable taste and who buys up the modern comfortable furniture as soon as the Eastlake mediæval furniture, inlaid with tiles, is being installed. The furniture in its turn does not harmonize with the modern house. The house is rebuilt in the old style. Then the landscape has to be altered to fit the house. Home becomes more and more uncomfortable

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as it is getting more and more Eastlake and stylish. Finally the climax comes when *Tom* suggests that in order to bring about more complete harmony the modern dress should be discarded in favor of an Eastlake suit with pegs and with tiles in the back. This last joke pointing out the absurdity of the whole situation is the last straw that breaks the camel's back. *Tom's* modern house with the same "old" modern furniture is bought by the fashionable couple who now thoroughly enjoy their own discarded furniture. The full-blown bubble of folly has collapsed.

This method of blowing of the bubble of folly and absurdity with all its play of iridescent colors, until it finally bursts, this heaping of absurdities until they accumulate and form a pile which collapses on account of its inner absurd instability, this method of bringing the absurd to a climax by increasing its extension and intension, is quite common with many comic writers. We find it in the immortal comedies of Aristophanes, in his "Clouds," in which he ridicules the sophistic philosophy of his time; we find it in "The Frogs," in which he heaps scorn on the tragic poets, Æschylus and Euripides; we find it again in his immortal burlesque "The Congress of Women," in which Aristophanes with all the titanic power of his comic genius rails at the whole political structure of the Athenian commonwealth and holds up to the ridicule of his contemporaries what twenty-four centuries later will agitate the civilized world,—the campaign of woman suffrage now carried on with so much bluster, swagger, and storm.

In Lucian again we meet with the same method of ridicule. Thus in "The True History" or in his "Trips to the Moon," he rails and scoffs at the histories and

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traditions of his time by piling preposterous nonsense on stupid absurdities. In his introduction to "The True History" he says :

I do not blame (writers) for their falsehoods, seeing that the custom has been sometimes authorized, even by the pretenders to philosophy. I only wonder that they should expect to be believed. Being incited by a ridiculous vanity to transmit something to posterity I turned my thoughts towards falsehood. I shall at least tell one thing true, when I tell you that I lie and I mean to speak not a word of truth. Know ye, therefore, that I am going to write about what I never saw myself, nor experienced, nor so much as heard from anybody else, and what is more, of such things as neither are, nor ever can be.

Then Lucian gives full rein to his exuberant fancy. He tells of rivers of wine full of fish, of the mark left by Hercules' footstep, a mark that measured about an acre, he describes beautiful women growing like vines out of the soil. The limbs of the women "are perfect from the waist, only from the tops of the fingers branches sprung out full of grapes. They would not suffer us to taste the grapes, but when anybody attempted it, cried out as if they were hurt." He describes minutely the war between *Endymion*, the king of the moon, and *Phæton*, the king of the sun. He gives the most absurd description of the battle array and the most ludicrous names of the warriors, such as flea-archers, millet-darters, mushroom-men, acorn-dogs and garlic-fighters. The battalions fight with garlic and radishes as their arms. Even the Biblical Jonah's whale is present. The whale, however, is expanded and puffed up on the comic Lucian scale, it is fifteen hundred stadia in length (a stadium is

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about six hundred feet). The whale came near "and swallowed us up at once, ship and all. He did not, however, crush with his teeth,—the vessel luckily slipped through one of the interstices." Even the miracle of walking on the waves of the sea is not unknown to this irreverent comic writer. In his droll way he tells us how he arrived at a "green and briny sea, where we saw a great number of men running backwards and forwards, resembling ourselves in every part, except the feet which were all of cork." Lucian then scoffingly tells of his visit to Paradise.

The whole city was of gold and the walls of emerald. The seven gates were all made of one trunk of the cinnamon tree, the pavement, within the walls, of ivory, the temples of beryl, the altars of one large amethyst. Round the city flowed a river of the most precious ointment. The baths instead of water were filled with warm dew. For clothes they wear spider's web. They have no bodies, but only the appearance of them, insensible to the touch, and without flesh, yet they stand, taste, move, and speak.

Piling absurdity upon absurdity, he derides the beliefs and traditions current in his time and brings discredit on the credulity of his contemporaries.

Cervantes, in ridiculing the chivalry of the Middle Ages, makes *Don Quixote*, the knight-errant, work himself up to a pitch of knightly phrenzy in which he loses his wits so completely as to regard the inferior under the glamor of the sublime and the superior. He takes a country inn for a castle, the servant girls for princesses, the innkeeper as the lord of the castle. He fights wind-mills, regarding them as transformed giants, and attacks herds of sheep under the idea that they are enchanted

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armies. Cervantes keeps on heaping absurd incidents in which the folly of the hero is exposed to the reader. In weaving his web of glory around prosaic things the ridiculous character of the knight of the sorrowful figure of *La Mancha* stands out in an even clearer light with the accumulation of absurd events and with the thickening of the plot of a supersensuous ideal folly.

Similarly Voltaire, when ridiculing the shallow optimistic philosophy of the eighteenth century, makes *Candid* and *Professor Pangloss* pass through all sorts of painful situations, exposing with ever greater power and emphasis the weakness, the silliness, the stupidity of professorial optimism. The vast accumulation of mishaps, misfortunes and suffering in this best of all possible worlds is concluded by *Pangloss*' remark :

"All events are inextricably linked together in this best of all possible worlds; for look you, if you had not been driven out of a magnificent castle by hearty kicks for presuming to make love to Miss Cunegund, if you had not been put into the Inquisition, if you had never run your sword through the Baron or lost all your sheep from the fine country of El Dorado, you would not be here now eating candied citrons and pistachio-nuts."

"Well said!" answered *Candid*, "but we must attend to our garden."

The full blown bubble of optimism made up of pain, privation and suffering bursts and vanishes.

We may point out another important principle of the ludicrous, that of *interchange*. Any interchange of cause and effect of antecedents and consequents associated with the relation of superior and inferior arouses the sense of the ludicrous. Thus Stockton, in his humorous descrip-

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tion of the haunted ghost, also in his directions or instructions given to the young American youth as to how to bring up parents, makes us laugh at the interchange of relations of superior and inferior. The superior reduced to the inferior, or the inferior raised playfully to the level of the superior gives rise to the ludicrous. In short, any interchange of places in a series or in different series of events in the contrasting relationship of superior and inferior is the cause of laughter. Falling into a pit dug for others, being caught into a trap laid for one's neighbor, being entangled in a net intended for your friend or enemy, all that is a source of amusement. Any fooling with others and being fooled in turn cannot help awaken the sense of the ludicrous.

We have here a double play on fooling, human folly is doubly exposed to the view of the observer and hence hilarious laughter. The ghost from haunting the living is haunted *by* the living, the cheat is deceived by his own well-laid schemes, the intriguer is caught in the network of his own intrigues, the "wise" are entangled in the meshes of their own conceit and folly, the joke is turned on the joker; all such play of interchange of relations is sure to raise in us the laughter of ridicule. Any interchange of links in series of events, giving rise to associations of inferiority, arouses laughter. Many comical situations are brought about by this principle of interchange.

When by association a series of events becomes firmly fixed in the mind, such as manners, customs and beliefs, any change in the sequence of the events, any variation in the order fixed by association of contiguity, a form into which the human mind easily drifts, arouses in the mind the sense of the ludicrous. The philistine regards

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all variations from his accepted routine of life as something inherently absurd, silly and ridiculous. On the other hand, nothing forms such a good subject for the comic as the narrow-minded, hide-bound, Lilliputian philistine when viewed from the heights of talent and genius. Society and its ideal average, normal mediocrity with its pleasing, mannerly, commonplace platitudes may have its fling of jeering at genius for not conforming to social usage and for breaking away from the well-trodden paths or social ruts. Far more effective and deadly are the stones of ridicule cast by the hand of genius at the Philistine Goliath, strong in his brute social power, but dull of wits. Social laughter is momentary, soon burns itself out and passes away like the fire and smoke of straw, but genius shakes the very skies with its lasting, inextinguishable laughter.

CHAPTER XII

THE COMIC IN LITERATURE

Shakespeare in his comedies uses inferior, humiliating, clumsy, and awkward situations to throw ridicule on the characters which he wishes to make comic. Thus in the "Merry Wives of Windsor" Shakespeare makes *Falstaff* relate to *Master Brook* the adventures passed through with *Mistress Ford*.

Fal. The peaking Cornute her husband, Master Brook, dwelling in a continual 'larum of jealousy, comes in the instant of our encounter, after we had embraced, kissed, protested and, as it were, spoke the prologue of our comedy; and at his heels a rabble of his companions, thither provoked and instigated by his distemper, and, forsooth, to search his house for his wife's love.

Ford. What, while you were there?

Fal. While I was there.

Ford. And did he search for you, and did not find you?

Fal. You shall hear. As good luck would have it, comes in one Mistress Page; gives intelligence of Ford's approach; and, in her inventions and Ford's wife's distraction, they conveyed me into a buck-basket.

Ford. A buck-basket!

Fal. By the Lord, a buck-basket!—rammed me in with foul shirts and smocks, socks, foul stockings, greasy napkins; that, Master Brook, there was the rankest compound of villainous smell ever offended nostril.

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The ridiculous situation in which *Falstaff* is put by the humiliation and discomfiture of his adventure with *Mistress Ford* is all the more enhanced by his relating all that to *Mr. Brook*, who is no other than *Mr. Ford*, the lady's husband in disguise. *Falstaff* unconsciously tells of his humiliating and, hence, ridiculous situation to the very man whom he would least have cared to meet.

Fal. Nay, you shall hear, Master Brook, what I have suffered. Being thus crammed in the basket, a couple of Ford's knaves, his hands, were called forth by their mistress to carry me in the name of the foul clothes to Datchet-lane: they took me on their shoulders; met the jealous knave their master in the door, who asked them once or twice what they had in their basket: I quaked for fear, lest the lunatic-knave would have searched it; but fate, ordaining he should be cuckold, held his hand. Well: on went he for a search, and away went I for foul clothes. But mark the sequel, Master Brook: I suffered the pangs of three several deaths; first, an intolerable fright, to be detected with a jealous rotten bellwether; next, to be compassed, like a good bilbo, in the circumference of a peck, hilt to point, heel to head; and then, to be stopped in, like a strong distillation, with stinking clothes that fretted in their own grease: think of that,—a man of my kidney,—think of that,—that am as subject to heat as butter; a man of continual dissolution and thaw; it was a miracle to 'scape suffocation. And in the height of this bath, when I was more than half stewed in grease, like a Dutch dish, to be thrown into the Thames, and cooled, glowing hot in that surge like a horse-shoe; think of that,—hissing hot,—think of that, Master Brook.

Of his next adventure with *Mrs. Ford*, *Falstaff* tells *Mr. Brook*:

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"I went to her, Master Brook, as you see, like a poor old man: but I came from her, Master Brook, like a poor old woman. That same knave Ford, her husband, hath the finest mad devil of jealousy in him, Master Brook, that ever governed frenzy. I will tell you:—he beat me grievously, in the shape of a woman, for in the shape of man, Master Brook, I fear not Goliath with a weaver's beam."

Shakespeare tells us here why to dress like a woman is comic, because it is inferior, it means to be unmanly, cowardly, to be inferior to the high dignity of manhood. The beating of an old woman by a strong man appears to have been quite comical in the time of Shakespeare. It was the expression of the superior way of triumph over an old witch. The lack of sympathy, the brutality of that age may be illustrated by the following anecdote taken from a book on old English jokes:

A witch being at the stake to be burnt, she saw her son there and, being very dry, desired him to give her drink. "No, Mother," says the son, "'twill do you wrong; for the dryer you be, you'll burn all the better."

In the enchanting fairy-comedy, "A Midsummer-Night's Dream," Shakespeare represents the elf king *Oberon* as putting *Titania*, the fairy queen, in an inferior and hence ludicrous condition by throwing a charm on her and having her fall in love with the vulgar clown-weaver, *Bottom*, on whom the merry *Puck* claps an ass's head. *Bottom* sings his asinine song:

The ousel cock so black of hue,
With orange-tawny bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
The wren with little quill.

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Tita. [*Awaking*] What Angel wakes me from my flowery bed?

Bot. [*Sings*]

The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
The plain song cuckoo gray,
Whose note full many a man doth mark,
And dares not answer nay;—

for, indeed, who would set his wit to so foolish a bird?
who would give a bird the lie, though he cry “cuckoo”
never so?

Tita. I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again:

Mine ear is much enamour'd of thy note;
So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape;
And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me
On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.

Crowned with a chaplet of flowers *Bottom's* asinine head reposes on the graceful bosom of the fairy queen. Here Shakespeare avails himself of the still lower form of degradation by making the delicate and exquisite fairy queen fall in love with a hairy ass, a vulgar, low fellow and brute, thus depriving her of all appreciation of the good, true, and the beautiful. In fact, he makes her all the lower and all the more ridiculous by putting the little fairy queen in the position of taking the low, the inferior, the vulgar as the superior, excellent, and refined. Nothing can be more ridiculous than matching a fairy and an ass, nothing can be more ludicrous than vulgar taste in a fairy. As the Bible puts it: “As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman without taste and discretion.” The contrast emphasizes difference of superior and inferior.

When Homer in his masterly strokes of genius pictures the ludicrous, clumsy, awkward, and ungainly form

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of the cyclop, *Polyphemus*, he gives the outlines of the monster in a few humorous lines:

A form enormous! far unlike the race
Of human birth, in stature, or in face;
As some lone mountain's monstrous growth he stood
Crowned with rough thickets, and a nodding wood.

Ulysses conceives the idea of making the cyclop drunk with wine:

Such was the wine; to quench whose fervent stream
Scarce twenty measures from the living stream
To cool one cup sufficed.

Ulysses then persuades the monster to taste of the wine:

"Cyclop; since human flesh has been thy feast,
Now drain this goblet, potent to digest!"
He heard, he took, and pouring down his throat,
Delighted, swill'd the large luxurious draught.
"More! give me more!" (he cried); "the boon be thine,
Whoe'er thou art that bear'st celestial wine!
Declare thy name; not mortal is this juice,
But this descended from the bless'd abodes,
A rill of nectar, streaming from the gods"
He said, and greedy grasped the heady bowl,
Thrice drained, and poured the deluge on his soul.
His sense lay covered with the dozy fume;
While thus my fraudulent speech I reassume
"Thy promised boon, O Cyclop! now I claim
And plead my title, *Noman* is my name."

The generosity of the monster is then humorously set forth:

The giant then: "Our promised grace receive,
The hospitable boon we mean to give:

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When all thy wretched crew have felt my power,
Noman shall be the last I will devour."

When *Ulysses* with his companions deprive the monster of his eyesight, the cyclop,

With voice like thunder, and a direful yell
Calls the cyclops that around him dwell.

The cyclops come,

Inquire the cause, and crowd the cavern door:
"What hurts thee, Polyphemus? What strange affright
Thus breaks our slumbers, and disturbs the night?
Does any mortal, in the unguarded hour
Of sleep oppress thee, or by fraud or power?
Or thieves insidious thy fair flock surprise?"
Thus they: the cyclop from his den replies:
"Friends, Noman kills me; Noman, in the hour
Of sleep, oppresses me with fraudulent power."
"If Noman hurt thee, but the hand divine
Inflicts diseases, it fits to resign:
To Jove or thy father Neptune pray,"
The brethren cried, and instant strode away.

Thus does Homer amuse his hearers with the clumsy, ungainly figure of the brutal, stupid monster by drawing a picture of the inferior, savage type of man-cyclop to the delight and ridicule of his Homeric audience.

In "The Tempest" Shakespeare, under different circumstances, draws a similar scene of the drunken monster *Caliban*:

The drunken sailor *Stephano* finds the cowering and trembling monster *Caliban*:

Ste. This is some monster of the isle with four legs, who hath got, as I take it, an ague. . . . I will give him some relief if it be but for that. . . . He shall taste

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of my bottle. . . . Come on your ways; open your mouth; here is that which will give language to you, cat: open your mouth; this will shake your shaking, I can tell you, and that soundly: you cannot tell who's your friend: open your chops again.

Under the influence of drink *Caliban* gets a ludicrous fit of exaltation, displaying his low, mean type:

Cal. [*Aside*] That's a brave god, and bears celestial liquor: I will kneel to him. . . .

I'll swear, upon that bottle, to be thy true subject; for the liquor is not earthly.

Trinculo (the jester) O Stephano, hast any more of this?

Ste. The whole butt, man: my cellar is in a rock by the sea-side, where my wine is hid. How now, moon-calf! how does thine ague?

Cal. Hast thou not dropped from heaven?

Ste. Out o' the moon, I do assure thee; I was the man i' the moon when time was.

Cal. I have seen thee in her and I do adore thee: my mistress show'd me thee, and thy dog, and thy bush.

Ste. Come, swear to that; kiss the book: I will furnish it anon with new contents: swear.

Trin. By this good light, this is a very shallow monster! I afeard of him! A very weak monster! The man i' the moon! A most credulous monster! Well drawn, monster, in good sooth!

Cal. I'll show thee every fertile inch o' th' island; and I will kiss thy foot: I prithee, be my god.

Trin. By this light, a most perfidious and drunken monster! when's god's asleep, he'll rob him o' his bottle.

Cal. I'll kiss thy foot; I'll swear myself thy subject.

Ste. Come on then; down, and swear.

Trin. I shall laugh myself to death at this puppy-headed monster.

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We realize once more how Shakespeare, following Homer, has his sport of the ugly, ungainly monstrosity of a *Caliban* by making him resemble man, and then depriving him of all human qualities. The image of a degraded, low, mean, and drunken *man-Caliban* is pictured before the eyes of the spectators and stirs up derision and ridicule.

In a similar ludicrous way Swift treats the classic story of *Baucis* and *Philemon*, who, for their goodness and piety, have been changed by *Jupiter* into a linden tree and an oak. The miracle occurs to two wandering saints, the house being changed into a church, of which *Philemon* is made the parson:

They scarce had spoke, when fair and soft,
The roof began to mount aloft;
Aloft rose every beam and rafter;
The heavy wall climb'd slowly after.
The chimney widen'd, and grew higher,
Became a steeple with a spire.
The kettle to the top was hoist,
And there stood fasten'd to a joist,
But with the upside down, to show
Its inclination for below:
In vain; for a superior force
Applied at bottom stops its course:
Doom'd ever in suspense to dwell,
'Tis now no kettle, but a bell.

Thus in his humorous way does Swift ridicule the classic story and the church miracles by interweaving a miraculous story of saints and holy church with the pagan myth, interrelating the chimney with the church steeple and lofty spire, converting the profane inverted kitchen kettle into the consecrated bell. The saint, the

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heavy climbing of the wall after the beam and rafter, the church, the bell, and the kettle with its "inclination for below" all become intertwined in the miraculous myth. The whole forms an excellent parody in which the solemn, the majestic, and the sacred are reduced to the low, mean state of the vulgar pot and kettle.

Similarly Heine, in his "Ideas," writes:

I was once asked six times in succession, "Henri, what is the French for the faith?" And six times, ever more weeping, I replied, "It is called *le credit*." And after the seventh question, with his cheeks of a red deep cherry rage color, my furious examiner cried, "It is *la religion*!" and there was a rain of blows and a thunder of laughter from all my schoolmates.

In another place Heine writes:

The Berliner appeared to listen to me somewhat distractedly—more attractive objects had drawn his attention—and he finally interrupted me with the words, "Excuse me, if you please, if I interrupt you, but will you be so kind as to tell me what sort of a dog that is which runs there?"

"That is another puppy."

"Ah, you don't understand me. I refer to the great white shaggy dog without a tail."

"My dear sir, that is the dog of the modern Alcibiades."

"But," exclaimed the Berliner, "where is then the modern Alcibiades himself?"

"To tell the plain truth," I replied, "the office is not as yet occupied and we have so far only his dog."

In the first sally Heine ridicules religion by associating it with the lower form of business credit. Religion with its high claims, unworldly views, ideals, and beliefs is reduced to sordid credit, business, and cash. In the

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second sally Heine ridicules the politics and statesmen of his day by having them go to the dogs. The ridicule is all the stronger by bringing in the illustrious classical name of Alcibiades and then leaving in his place his proverbial tailless dog. Where there should have been a superior statesman, like Alcibiades, there we only find a puppy without a tail. In both cases the ridicule consists in showing a low, mean vulgarity where there should have been superiority and excellence. We laugh because we find the shadow instead of the substance, the vulgar instead of the sacred, the tail instead of the body, and where there should have been the man we only find a cur. The grand ideals of faith are based on commercial credit and the statesman is represented by a dog.

CHAPTER XIII

AMERICAN RIDICULE

In America ridicule has taken the turn towards blunt humor. This is largely due to the absence of revered traditions, fixed customs, unalterable habits and, above all, to the absence of intolerance so characteristic of American life.

Mark Twain ridicules Congress as fools and associates Jesus with broken pitchers, with miraculous gathering of water in mantles, with the schoolmaster, the birch, and whippings.

In another place Mark Twain ridicules the Biblical stories and the hypocritical interest in Biblical subjects as well as the credulity, the gullibility of the religious public. Mark Twain travels in Palestine and is shown the center of the earth and the tomb of Adam! His comments are not exactly inspired by reverence and piety.

Benjamin Franklin, with his true Yankee humor, tells of a sectarian who modestly claims:

X It had pleased God to enlighten our minds so as to see that some doctrines which were esteemed truths were errors, and that others which we had esteemed errors were real truths. From time to time he has pleased to afford us further light, and our principles have been improving and our errors diminishing. This modesty in a sect is perhaps a single instance in the history of mankind, every other sect supposing itself in possession of all truths, and

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those which differ are so far in the wrong; like a man traveling in foggy weather, those at some distance before him on the road he sees wrapped up in the fog as well as those behind him, and also the people in the fields on each side, but near him all appears clear, though, in truth, he is as much in the fog as any of them.

In a comic way Benjamin Franklin holds up to ridicule the sermons of his countrymen:

We had for a chaplain a zealous Presbyterian minister, Mr. Beatty, who complained to me that the men (soldiers) did not generally attend his prayers and exhortations. When they enlisted, they were promised, besides pay and provisions, a gill of rum a day, which was punctually served out to them, one half in the morning, and the other half in the evening; and I observed they were as punctual in attending to receive it; upon which I said to Mr. Beatty: "It is, perhaps, below the dignity of your profession to act as steward of the rum, but if you were to deal it out and only just after prayers, you would have them all about you." He liked the thought, undertook the task, and, with the help of a few hands to measure out the liquor, executed it to satisfaction and never were prayers more generally and more punctually attended; so that I thought this method preferable to the punishment inflicted by some military laws for non-attendance on divine service.

We offer two more examples of Franklin's ridicule on the sharp, unscrupulous bargain driving of the unctuous quaker, pious puritan, and his sanctimonious countrymen:

In going through the Indian country to carry a message from our governor to the council at Onondaga, he (Conrad Weiser) called at the habitation of Canassetego, an old acquaintance, who embraced him, spread furs for him to

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sit on, and placed before him some boiled beans and venison and mixed some rum and water for his drink. When he was well refreshed and had lit his pipe, Canassetego began to converse with him; asked him how he had fared the many years since they had seen each other, whence he then came, what occasioned his journey, etc. Conrad answered all his questions, and when the discourse had begun to flag the Indian, to continue it, said: "Conrad, you have lived long among the white people and know something of their customs. I have been sometimes at Albany, and have observed that once in seven days they shut up their shops and assemble all in the great house. Tell me what it is for. What do they do there?" "They meet there," says Conrad, "to hear and learn good things." "I do not doubt," says the Indian, "that they tell you so—they have told me the same; but I doubt the truth of what they say, and I will tell you my reasons. I went lately to Albany to sell my skins and buy blankets, knives, powder, rum, etc. You know I used generally to deal with Hans Hanson, but I was a little inclined this time to try some other merchants. However, I called first upon Hans and asked him what he would give for beaver. He said he could not give any more than four shillings a pound; 'But,' says he, 'I cannot talk on business now: this is the day when we meet together to learn good things, and I am going to meeting.' So I thought to myself, 'Since I cannot do any business to-day, I may as well go to the meeting, too,' and I went with him. There stood up a man in black and began to talk to the people very angrily. I did not understand what he said; but, perceiving that he looked much at me and at Hanson, I imagined he was angry at seeing me there; so I went out, sat down near the house, struck fire and lit my pipe, waiting till the meeting should break up. I thought, too, that the man had mentioned something of beaver, and I suspected it might be the subject of their meeting. So when they came out I accosted my merchant.

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'Well, Hans,' says I, 'I hope you have agreed to give more than four shillings a pound.' 'No,' says he; 'I cannot give more than three shillings and sixpence.' Then I spoke to several dealers, but they all sang the same song—three and sixpence—three and sixpence. This made it clear to me that my suspicion was right; and that, whatever they pretended of meeting to learn good things, the real purpose was to consult how to cheat Indians in the price of beaver. Consider but a little, Conrad, and you must be of my opinion. If they met so often to learn good things, they would certainly have learned some before this time. But they are still ignorant. You know our practice. If a white man in traveling through our country enters one of our cabins, we all treat him as I treat you: we dry him if he is wet; we warm him if he is cold and give him meat and drink that he may allay his thirst and hunger; and we spread soft furs for him to rest and sleep on. We demand nothing in return. But if I go into a white man's house at Albany and ask for victuals and drink, they say: 'Where is your money?' and if I have none they say: 'Get out, you Indian dog!' You see they have not learned those little good things that we need no meetings to be instructed in, because our mothers taught them to us when we were children; and therefore it is impossible their meetings should be, as they say, for any such purpose or have any such effect: they are only to contrive the cheating of Indians in the price of beaver."

The following story is in the true Franklin style on the dogmatic, authoritative faith of missionaries as well as on their self-contentment and conceit:

A Swedish minister having assembled the chiefs of the Susquehanna Indians made a sermon to them, acquainting them with the principal historical facts on which our religion is founded—such as the fall of our first parents by

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eating an apple, the coming of Christ to repair the mischief, his miracles and sufferings, etc. When he had finished an Indian orator stood up to thank him. "What you have told us," says he, "is all very good. It is indeed bad to eat apples. It is better to make them all into cider. We are much obliged by your kindness in coming so far to tell us those things which you have heard from your mothers. In return, I will tell you some of those we have heard from ours. In the beginning, our fathers had only the flesh of animals to subsist on, and, if their hunting was unsuccessful, they were starving. Two of our young hunters having killed a deer made a fire in the woods to broil some parts of it. When they were about to satisfy their hunger, they beheld a beautiful young woman descend from the clouds and seat herself on that hill which you see yonder among the Blue Mountains. They said to each other: 'It is a spirit that perhaps has smelt our broiling venison and wishes to eat of it; let us offer some to her.' They presented her with the tongue; she was pleased with the taste of it and said: 'Your kindness shall be rewarded; come to this place after thirteen moons, and you will find something that will be of great benefit in nourishing you and your children to the latest generations.' They did so, and to their surprise found plants they had never seen before, but which from that ancient time have been cultivated among us to our great advantage. Where her right hand had touched the ground they found maize; where her left hand had touched it they found kidney-beans." The good missionary, disgusted with this idle tale, said: "What I delivered to you were sacred truths; but what you tell me is mere fable, fiction, and falsehood." The Indian, offended, replied: "My brother, it seems your friends have not done you justice in your education; they have not well instructed you in the rules of common civility. You saw that we, who understand and practice those rules, believed all your stories; why do you refuse to believe ours?"

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The comments of the Indian on Sunday services and the story about the missionary are in the true Socratic vein of irony and ridicule.

Possibly no one can so well appreciate the characteristic faults and comic traits of a nation as the best representatives of the nation itself. Washington Irving, now the classic in all American schools, saw clearly through the business aptitudes of his countrymen. In his story "The Devil and Tom Walker," *Tom's* wife tried to drive a bargain with the devil, but she had the worst of it. *Tom* and the devil began to haggle over terms. Finally the devil proposed to *Tom* to turn usurer, to form a kind of money trust, a form of trust which has of late become so powerful in the land. *Tom* was eager to start into business at once. He promised to charge rates double of what the very devil would ask, to extort bonds, foreclose mortgages, drive merchants into bankruptcy and generally to drive them to the devil.

These overreaching Yankee dealings which have recently given rise to all the forms of trusts and monopolies which, like a nightmare, weigh so heavily on the heart of the people and have a mortal grip on the very life of the nation, are comically foreshadowed in the burlesque on the sharp business dealings of the early American itinerant speculators, the ancestors of our modern king financiers, oil magnates, steel princes and coal barons who now, like rulers of old, claim the privilege of divine authority.

We may take the following passage by Goodrich:

"Have you got Young's Night Thoughts?"

"Plenty."

"Let me see one."

Here I showed Mr. Fleecer the book.

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"This is not the right kind," said he, "I want that edition that's got the picter at the beginning of a gal walken out by starlight, called 'Contemplation.'" I handed my customer another copy,—he then went on, "Aye, this is it. That are picter there, is a very material p'int, Doctor. The young fellers down in Kentucky think it's a walloping kind of story, you know, about some gal that's in love. They look at that title-page, and see, 'Night Thoughts, by Alexander Young.' Well, that seems as if it meant something queer. So they look to the frontispiece, and see a female all wrapped up in a cloak, goen out very sly, with nothing under heaven but the stars to see what she's about. 'Hush, hush,' I say, and look round as if afeard that somebody would hear us. And then I shut up the book, and put it into my chist, and deliberately lock the lid. Then the feller becomes rampacious. He begs, and wheedles, and flatters, and at last he swears. I shake my head. Finally he takes out a five-dollar bill; I slip it into my pocket and tell him not to let anybody know who sold it to him, and not to take off the brown paper kiver till he gets shut up tight in his own room. I then say, 'Good-day, Mister,' and clear out like chain lightning, for the next county."

"You seem to be pleased with your recollections, Fleecer."

"Well, I can't help snickering when I think of them fellers. Why, Bleech, I sold more than tew hundred o' them Night Thoughts, for five dollars apiece, in Kentucky, last winter and all the fellers bought 'em under the idea that 'twas some queer story, too good to be altogether decent."

"So you cheated 'em, ha?"

"I cheated 'em? not I, indeed! If they were cheated at all, they cheated themselves, I guess. I didn't tell 'em a lie. Couldn't they see for themselves? Haven't they got eyes? Why, what should a feller du? They come smellin' about like rats arter cheese, and ax me if I haint got some

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rowdy books: I show 'em the 'Sky Lark' and 'Peregrine Pickle,' and so on, but they want something better. Well, now, as I told you afore, I'm a deacon's son, and I don't like to sell 'Tom Paine,' and 'Volney's Ruins,' and that sort o' thing. So thinks I to myself—I'll play them sparks a Yankee trick. They want some rowdy books, and I'll sell 'em something pious. In this way they get some good, and in course of providence, they may be convarted. Well, the first one I tried, it worked like ginger. He bought the book at a tavern. Arter he'd got it he couldn't hardly wait, he was so fairse to read it. So he went into a room, and I peeped through the key hole. He began at the title-page, and then he looked at the figger of Miss Contemplation walking forth among the stars. I could see his mouth water. Then he turned to the first part, and begun to read. I heerd him as plain as Doctor Belcher's sarmon; it went pretty much like this,—

(Reads)

'The Complaint. Night I'—

“‘Good—that's natural,’ says he.

(Reads)

'On Life, Death, and Immortality.'—

“‘Whew! I suppose it's some feller in love, and is going to cut his throat.'

(Reads)

'Tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep!

He, like the world, his ready visit pays,

When fortune smiles,'—

“‘That's all gammon!'

(Reads)

'Night, sable goddess! from her ebon throne,'—

“‘What in nater is the fellow at?'

(Reads)

'The bell strikes one; we take no note of time,'—

“‘Why, that's exactly what the parson said in his sarmon last Sunday!' ”

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He turns over several pages. (Reads)

'Night II. On Time, Death and Friendship.

'When the cock crowed, he wept,'—

"'By Saint Peter, I'm gummed! That d——d Yankee peddler has sold me a psalm-book, or something of the kind, and made me believe it was a rowdy. The infernal hypocrite! And so I've paid five dollars for a psalm-book! Well, it's a good joke, and the fellow deserves his money for his ingenuity. He, he, he! ho, ho, ho! I must laugh, tho' I'm as mad as a snapping-turtle. Zachary! If I could get his nose betwixt my thumb and finger, I'd make him sing every line in the book to a tune of my own. To sell me a psalm-book!—the canting, whining, blue-light peddler! Fire and brimstone! It makes me sweat to think on't. And he did it so sly, too—the wooden-nutmeg rascal! I wish I could catch him!'

"By this time, I thought it best to make myself scarce. I had paid my bill, and my horse and wagon were all ready, for I had calculated upon a bit of a breeze. I mounted my box, and having axed the landlord the way to Lexington, I took the opposite direction to throw my psalm-book friend off the scent, in case he was inclined for a chase; so I pursued my journey and got clear. I met the fellow about six months arter, at Nashville; I was going to ax him if he had a psalm-book to part with, but he looked so plaguey hard at me, that I cocked my beaver over my right eye, and squinted with my left and walked on. Sen then, I haint seen him."

Bret Harte humorously pictures the rude life of the American West, the shrewdness of the Yankee, and the sharp way his countryman makes use of publicity, craving for sensationalism, advertisement, and shallow curiosity about worthless trifles and gossip.

One cannot help viewing in a ludicrous light the pas-

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sion that has seized so uncontrollably on the mind of the American, the passion for sensation, news, trifling newspaper gossip, insatiate love of notoriety, and unshakable faith in the great utility of advertisement. The advertising spirit is in the land and the people worship it with all their heart and with all their soul. One even reads "scientific" researches by American scientists on the subject of advertisement! More than half the value of American goods consists in the immense waste spent on the crying out their virtues. This holds true not only of commercial lines, but also of political, moral, and religious. The American public is like one vast howling mob in which every one tries to outdo and outbawl his neighbor. The nation is a vast multitude obsessed by the demoniacal spirit of advertisement, notoriety, curiosity, small gossip, and sensationalism, while really important news and live facts are omitted, ignored, and suppressed by the advertising spirit of money and large business interests.

In his story, "An Apostle of the Tules," Bret Harte x shows that under the cloak of religious revival there are only animality, brutality, and degradation. He shows in the revivalist, *Brother Silas*, the dull, emotional, hysterical, sickly, and inferior type of mind saturated by the spirit of mediocre self-contentment, vanity, and conceit. Where we should expect a spiritual expression we only find a "stolid face, heavy, animal, and unintelligent." Nero expounding the truths of Christianity, the gladiator punctuating the Sermon on the Mount with a sword in his hand, the prize-fighter holding revival meetings and illustrating Christian humility by boxing matches and prize-fights, these are in accord with American revival meetings. In this story Bret Harte shows the inferior under the garb of the superior and hence the derisive laughter.

CHAPTER XIV

RIDICULE, MALICE, AND THE HUMANE

In the hunting out of the mean, the vulgar, and the inferior under the dignified cloak of the great and the superior is there necessarily present an element of malice? Does ridicule disclose a mean, low, and malicious trait in human nature? Does ridicule consist not only in revealing the mean side of the object laughed at, but also of the persons who make merry over the defects and shortcomings of others? In other words, is ridicule necessarily the outcome of malice?

Some writers claim that the comic and the ludicrous flow from the malicious in human character. There is no comic without malice. Thus Spiller gives the following definition of the comic: "The comic implies a humiliating situation where the sense of malice is aroused so far as it satisfies and mechanically occupies the attention." It is claimed that the comic writer displays his narrow-mindedness in his lack of sympathy, in his lack of realization of his common nature with the rest of humanity.

While there is some truth in the assertion that a number of jokes and comic situations have a malicious element in them, still on the whole the statement is incorrect; it is specially false of the higher manifestations of the comic and the ridiculous. Children and men in the lower stages of development, such as we find in the

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case of savages and barbarians, find enjoyment in the comic and in the ridiculous without any regard to the special humiliation of any particular persons and classes. There is just laughter at funny situations, comic saws, and plays. In so far as there is play with the serious side of life the malicious element is completely absent.

There is comic play with the dignified and the sacred out of the exuberance of life. The inner sources of reserve energy are let free and man can see himself stronger, better, and superior to what he had been before. There is laughter, both as the result of the consciousness of his former weakness and shortcomings as well as from the present sense of power and play. "All pleasure," as Schopenhauer rightly puts it, "is derived from the use and consciousness of power." The malicious element is here entirely absent, and one who looks for fun, ridicule, and the ludicrous from the narrow standpoint of malice misses the fun of the play. There may be malicious laughter, but it is not true, conversely, that all comic laughter is malicious.

There is the comic laughter at the fun of play. The child puts himself in an inferior position, as in the game of blind man's buff, to satisfy himself and his playmates in the manifestation of reserve energy which comes pouring forth to the surface of their active life. Man often laughs at himself for his own amusement and for the amusement of his fellow men. There is certainly no malice in that; there is the sense of one's limitations which is at the bottom of such self-derisive laughter.

At the same time there is present the sense of the spiritual transcendence of the limitations, the sense that annuls such limitations by the consciousness of that fact. We may play at a game and laugh at ourselves and have

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others laugh at our clumsy, awkward, and ineffectual efforts. Many children and adults obtain immense pleasure from such games. They laugh uproariously at each effort and consequent failure. There is not the least sign or feeling of malice about it.

As we reach the highest forms of comic art the personal element becomes more and more eliminated and the ridicule is directed against impersonal ideas, ideals, beliefs, and institutions. What underlies such ridicule is the righteous indignation against snares, deceptions, and illusions that veil truth and reality from the gaze of humanity. Laughter at the ludicrous is far from being malicious, in fact, it is directed *against* evil and malicious elements. This is the main power of the comic drama and of all comic wit. All the examples brought above from the immortal Aristophanes to Lucian, Cervantes, Voltaire, and others, go to prove the important function of comic art in social life.

If tragedy, according to Aristotle, purges one of evil passions through sympathy with suffering, comedy purges the spectator or the hearer from the evils of life by means of sympathetic laughter. Laughter is directed against the inferior from the standpoint of the superior, who is thus purified from all sense of malice. *Laughter purges the superior from anger and vindictiveness with the inferior.*

In the higher forms of art ridicule flows from a source of recognition of a higher principle which is seen by the writer or poet who communicates his ideas, feelings, and ideals to the spectators, the audience, or the readers. Ridicule comes from a deep experience, from a profound knowledge of truth, and from a sympathy with human life. Through laughter man becomes

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purged of animal malice and rises to the highest forms of human sympathy and divine love.

The prophet Isaiah thunders his ridicule and invective against idol worshippers, both Israelite and Gentile, from the heights of monotheism which he has reached and to which he is anxious to lift up his fellow men :

The carpenter stretcheth out *his* rule; he marketh it out with the line; he fitteth with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house.

He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash and the rain doth nourish *it*.

Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth *it*, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth *it*; he maketh a graven image, and falleth down thereto.

He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied; yea, he warmeth *himself*, and saith, Ah, I am warm, I have seen the fire.

And the residue thereof he maketh a god, *even* his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth *it*, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou *art* my god.

The genius of the prophet places rightly the cause of the ludicrous when he tells us:

And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it; and shall I

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make the residue thereof an abomination? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?

After the prophet has poured out the vials of ridicule on the idol worshippers he exclaims:

Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.

Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, and He that formed thee from the womb, I *am* the Lord that maketh all *things*; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself.

I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

In another place the prophet takes up the same mockery and ridicule of idol-worship:

They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, *and* hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a god; they fall down, yea, they worship.

They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not be removed: yea, *one* shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.

The prophet soon becomes serious and declares the source whence the power of his ridicule has come:

Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring *it* again to mind, O ye transgressors.

Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else: I *am* God and *there is* none like me,

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient

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times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand.

Thus we find that ridicule may flow from the highest levels attained by man and may in turn give rise to love, mercy, and forgiveness.

Even Christ with his deep love and sympathy for erring humanity uses the potent tool of ridicule against the Pharisees and the false prophets:

Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Ye shall know them by their fruits . . .

And he adds the mordant ridicule:

Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

One cannot help finding ridicule in the casting out of devils:

So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine.

Now adds the Evangelist:

And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and, when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.

Christ ridicules the rich man by the metaphor of the camel and the needle.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus heaps ridicule on the Pharisees, their vanity, conceit, and hypocrisy, by characterizing them as "blind

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guides which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." He compares the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the hypocrites to men who clean the cup on the outside and leave the filth in the inside. Finally He likens them to whitened sepulchers beautiful on the outside and on the inside full of rot. From the highest point of moral life reached by Christ nothing looked so small, so mean, and so low as conceit, vanity, and hypocrisy personified by him in the Scribe and the Pharisee. This meanness Christ pierces with the sharp shafts of his pointed ridicule.

When the woman of Canaan, a poor pagan woman, came and worshipped him, saying, "Lord, help me," He humorously assumed the dignity of the aristocratic, exclusive Jew and scorned her with ridicule.

It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs.

Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

Thus the poor woman in her agony of grief replied, and the love and pity for which the Gospels characterize Jesus stood revealed behind the veil of ridicule on Gentile, and especially on the Canaanite.

Then Jesus answered and said unto her: O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.

In his more playful moods, when Peter, one of his favorite disciples, rebukes him for trying to challenge the scribes, the elders, and the priests in their own dens, Jesus replies:

Get thee behind me, Satan.

Behind the ridicule, or, rather, banter of Jesus there was no malice, there were pity, sympathy, and love for

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his persecutors, the Scribes and the Pharisees, on whom, however, he did not hesitate to pour the vials of his most invective ridicule. *Ridicule may flow from the purest source of human love.*

Laughter, when free from all distressing and sad emotions, is essentially *human*, and, what is more, is *humanizing*, for it is the beginning of reconciliation with our opponents. When we can laugh we are ready to forgive. *Laughter is the beginning of love.* Only he can truly laugh who can survey things from ever rising mountain tops of human sympathy and love.

To assert, then, as some do, with Hobbes that laughter, ridicule, and wit are intimately related to, and even have their root in, the feeling of malice is to misunderstand one of the most fundamental of human functions. Even the laughter of derision and scorn has the divine in it, not only because, as we have just pointed out, it indicates a higher standpoint, at least a recognition of the fact that he who is laughed at is on a lower plane of development, whether animal or human, but also because there is the gleam of peace in a smile, however inimical, *provided there is willingness on the scorned side to accept the olive branch of peace.* If the ridiculed person is not proud, touchy, selfish, conceited, and vain the recognition of the ridicule is the best form of reconciliation and the formation of a deeper love. When Aristophanes ridiculed Socrates and his school, Socrates stood up in the middle of the play that the people could compare the copy with the original. The Canaanite woman attracted the love of Christ when she humbly acknowledged the ridicule directed against her. *Laughter, when taken in the spirit of recognition of shortcomings and*

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reconciliation, makes for the best of friendship and for the deepest form of human love.

In the comic, as in all art, man is taken out of his narrow shell and made to transcend the limits of his individuality. Instead of being occupied with the constant harrowing cares and troubles of every-day life, with the struggle for existence and the fears of self-preservation, he is taken to a higher, freer region where the light of the sun is not dimmed by cloud and fog, where beauty never fades, where, fed on divine nectar of mirth and ambrosia of laughter, the joy of life ever fills the heart of man. Pain, misery, and sorrow are touched by the magic wand of laughter, raising suffering and distressed men to the lofty regions of inexpressible joy by awakening the feeling of the power of the human individuality. *Like tragedy, comedy sounds the depth of the human personality and reveals sources of human reserve energy of which man in his every-day life remains entirely unaware.*

Tragedy represents man struggling with overwhelming fate and misfortune, "a thinking reed resisting and opposing the elemental forces." The spectator catches a glimpse of the subconscious reserve energy stretching far into infinity. This glimpse is sufficient to have him lifted out of his narrow, individual cell from which he looks on the world. The bonds of individuality are momentarily broken and the person feels himself in harmony, in union, in deep sympathy with unhappiness and misfortune, a sympathy which purges away all the evil passions, as fire purifies gold from all dross. In tragedy *the person becomes free from all fear of the blind, elemental forces—he becomes a free spirit.*

In comedy the spirit of the human personality recog-

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nizes itself through joy. The individual is lifted to a higher standpoint, to loftier regions from which, like the Olympic gods, he can look down rejoicingly on the doings of men. Man is lifted above the cares of humdrum life; he sees the struggles, the fears, the pains, the misfortunes, the distresses as trivial, small, and mean. Like the Olympic gods, he passes his time in joy and laughter. Man moves freely without fear, with a smile and with laughter, above the worldly elements of chance, accident, fortune, and misfortune. What is all that to him? He laughs in joy and cares little for the turmoil and chaos of life. He sees nothing but the smiling light of the funny and the humorous. As the Bible puts it:

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that *it was* good.

In the darkness of man's life laughter is the light of the spirit. Through the comic the spirit of man moves above the darkness of the deep. Man soars above the gloomy void of existence, and smiles and laughs in joy.

In the comic man transcends the evil spirit of dark malice, and from the depth of his subconsciousness there heave up forces, energies, higher views, and principles which make him recognize imperfections, defects, faults. Man can laugh at them through the ease and grace with which they are overcome and transcended. The malicious element when present must be hidden and transformed by a deeper insight and higher standard of life in order to gain the sympathy of laughter. The prickles

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of ridicule guard the joy of life and beauty of the roses of laughter. Mirth, like Venus, may be born of the foam of life, but under the foam there are the depths of the ocean of being over which smile and laughter hover playfully.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MECHANICAL AND THE STUPID

Bergson, in his remarkable essay on laughter, claims that the ridiculous is present wherever the automatic, the absent-minded, the rigid, or the mechanical is detected in the flexible, ever adjusting spirit of the living; in other words, the ridiculous is the finding or revelation of the rigid, automatic mechanism that takes up its abode in the living soul. He studies the work of many comic writers, he analyzes jokes and witticisms and tries in all of them to find the mechanical behind life activity. Bergson lays down the law: "The attitudes, gestures, and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds one of a mere machine." "Something mechanical encrusted upon the living." "The body taking precedence of the soul. Matter seeking to outdo the mind, the letter aiming at ousting the spirit." "The laughable is something mechanical in something living." According to Bergson, "comedy combines events so as to introduce mechanism into the outer forms of life." "What is essentially laughable is what is done automatically." "Absentmindedness is always comical." "Any arrangement of acts and events is comic which gives us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement." "Inside the person we must distinctly perceive, as though through a glass, a set-up mechanism. The

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originality of a comic artist is thus expressed in the special kind of life he imparts to a mere puppet."

It is true that mechanism in life is a factor in the ludicrous, but it is not true when we assert the universal proposition that the ludicrous is nothing but the mechanical in life. Bergson got hold of only one of the factors of the ludicrous. It is true that the detection of the mechanical, of routine in life is a source of ridicule, it is, however, only one of the many streams from which ridicule is drawn, *but it is not the only one*.

Moreover, the stream has not been traced to its source. The mechanical in life is ludicrous not as mere mechanical, but because it is in relation to an *inferior* form of existence. The mechanical, the routine is ludicrous, because it is associated with deformities, meanness, triviality, debasement, frivolity, and inferiority. Bergson lays down the law: "We laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing." True, but do we not laugh every time when a person gives us the impression of being an animal, a brute, an ass?

We do not certainly think of mechanism when we compare a person to a cow, an ass, or a mule. The mechanical in life may be granted to be ludicrous, but it is by no means true that in every joke, pun, humor, and wit we are to look for the rigid, the mechanical. We laugh whenever we can detect the inferior under the cloak of the superior, whenever we can show the low, the mean, the base under the guise of the superior. We laugh when we can discern the fool's cap under the crown of the monarch, when we can see the ass's head on a *Bottom's* body, conditions hidden from us in the case of persons who happen to fascinate us by their superficial manners of dignity. We laugh, not only at the man of

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routine, but laugh all the more when we can discern in the respectable, dignified, moral, and religious man the scoundrel, the knave, and the rogue. We laugh whenever we discover the illusory under the veil of reality. We laugh whenever a low form of life attempts to impress us by superior airs. *We laugh at meanness, mediocrity, vanity, and conceit.*

Perhaps we may now further advance in our search for the nature of the ludicrous. We have pointed out that the finding of the inferior under the guise of the superior, discerning the low form under the veil of the higher is the essence of the ludicrous. Defects, deviations from the normal, from the ordinary standard accepted in the given community—low states, mean conditions of life paraded as merits and virtues, vanity, and conceit in the garb of respectability and dignity, all are good subjects for ridicule. The high form is shown to be illusory, deceptive. The person ridiculed is unconscious of his defects and shortcomings, and thinks that his low form is really a high one. All his actions, sayings, and mental activity flow from that source of unconsciousness, the unawareness of his low condition. In fact, he even regards his low state as the very best and the highest. Failures are taken by him as successes, and demerits are regarded as virtues.

In its more developed forms the naïve, unconscious state rises to extreme vanity and conceit. He cannot see himself as others see him. He is cursed with the delusion of parading the inferior as the superior, he takes the low as the high, the mean as the dignified. *Is not the ludicrous a form of mental blindness?*

There is no need to go far to look for this mental defect. Like dirt, it is ever present, we must constantly

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purify and clean ourselves from it. The ridiculous is something that takes direct possession of the soul and strikes at the very kernel of the human personality. Ridicule purifies the soul encrusted with moral dirt.

What defect acts so as to paralyze a person into unconsciousness of his own defects and failures? Is it not a defect of intelligence, a want of the reasoning powers? And still the defect, though mental, and affecting the reasoning capacities, must not be of the nature of a mental malady. For otherwise our pity would be aroused and we would regard it rather as a misfortune which would be more tragic than comic. The mental defect must be of such a character as can be corrected, or as something that may be rectified by the person. In short, *the subject of ridicule is foolishness, stupidity, ignorance.*

When we come to examine closely the sources of ridicule we find that possibly nothing so much answers the purpose of the comic as the dull of wit and the stupid. The boor, the yokel, the silly, the weakminded will ever form the theme of comedy and anecdote. It is the fool who is ridiculed. Whoever acts the superior being unconscious of his real inferiority or thinks that others cannot see it, while it is patent to everybody that he is below the average social standard of intellect, he is a fool and he is laughed at for his stupidity.

An ignorant fellow who tries to pass off as a learned professor or as a great scholar, even if he is conscious of his ignorance, but is unconscious of the fact that others can see through him, is a fit subject for ridicule. He is stupid and a fool.

The ludicrous side becomes even more enhanced if he is convinced that he is really a learned man and acts and talks accordingly, thus being doubly ignorant, ig-

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norant of his own condition and ignorant of the attitude that others have toward him. He is doubly foolish and the laughter at him is irresistible.

In cases where the cause of the ridicule is not clearly shown a little examination reveals the fact that it is the fool and human folly generally that excite the merriment and ridicule of people, they are the constant topic of the joker, the punster, the wit, and even of the earnest prophet, the psalmist, and Christ. The central character of comedy is the fool, and the subject of the comic is human folly. Human folly, under all its disguises and in all the endless forms of vanity, conceit, arrogance, false pride, false overestimation of self and things, institutions, manners, beliefs, and ideals, all defects and faults of the human soul that come under the categories of silliness, pig-headedness, asininity, are the subject of the comic and the ludicrous.

Cervantes lays his finger on the cause of the ludicrous by telling us plainly the source whence flow all the comic manifestations of that Divine Comedy in which is penned the immortal type of *Don Quixote*:

This gentleman (*Don Quixote*) gave himself up to the reading of tales of chivalry. Among them all none pleased him so much as those love speeches and challenges, where in several places he found written: "The reason of the unreasonable treatment of my reason in such wise, that with reason I complain of your beauty," and also when he read: "The high heaven of your divinity which divinely fortifies you with the stars making you meritorious of the merit merited by your greatness." With this kind of language the poor gentleman lost his wits. In short, he so bewildered himself in this kind of study that his brain was dried up in such a manner that he came to lose his wits.

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Aristophanes, in ridiculing Socrates, makes him occupy himself with silly questions such as :

The other day Socrates asked his disciple how many feet of its own feet a flea could jump. The disciple solved the problem in the cleverest way. He melted some wax; then took the flea and dipped its feet into the wax. When this was cold, the flea had slippers on; these he undid, and measured the distance.

The scrupulous exactness of this silly investigation reminds one of similar clever investigations carried out in many of our modern scientific laboratories, physical and psychological.

How many a noteworthy thing [Heine writes] can be adduced on ancient asses as opposed to the modern. How intelligent were the former and, ah! how stupid are the latter. How reasonably for instance spoke the ass of Balaam. . . . The modern asses are great asses. The antique asses—who had reached such a pitch of refinement—would turn in their graves could they hear how people talk about their descendants. Once "Ass" was an honorable title, signifying as much as "Court Counselor," "Baron," "Doctor of Philosophy."

In ridiculing the stupidity of German ideas Heine writes :

My washerwoman complains that the Reverend Mr. S. has been putting "ideas" into the head of her daughter, which have made her foolish and unreasonable. The coachman Patterson grumbles out on every occasion, "That's an idea! that's an idea!" Yesterday he was regularly vexed when I inquired what sort of a thing he imagined an idea to be. And vexedly did he growl "an idea is an idea! an idea is any d—d nonsense that a man gets into

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his head." It is in this sense that the word is used, as a title of a book, by the Court Counselor Heeren in Göttingen.

Heine tells us that the sources of his ridicule are the fool and human folly :

I really become cheerful when I reflect that all these fools whom I see here can be used in my writings; they are cash down, ready money. I feel like a diamond in cotton. The Lord hath blessed me, the fool crop has turned out uncommonly well this year, and like a good landlord I consume only a few at a time, and lay up the best for the future. Like a rich, plump merchant who rubbing his hands with genial joy wanders here and there amid chests, bales, boxes, and casks, even so do I wander around my people. Ye are all my own! Ye are all equally dear to me and I love ye, as ye yourselves love your own gold, and that is more than a little. Oh! how I laughed from my heart when I lately heard that one of my people had asserted with concern that he knew not how I could live, or what means I had—and yet he himself is such a first rate fool that I could live from him alone as on a capital.

Lack of intelligence, mediocrity, narrow-mindedness, stupidity, have always been the butt of ridicule. Even philosophers have castigated the philistine.

Schopenhauer's description of the small, narrow mind of mediocrity, keen for insignificant, inessential, practical points, may be interesting :

A philistine is a person with a small "normal" amount of intellect and with no mental needs. . . . A philistine is a person who is seriously occupied with realities which are no realities. . . . The philistine has no desire to gain knowledge for its own sake, he has no experience of true æsthetic pleasure. . . . His real pleasures are of a practical and sensual character. . . . If the

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luxuries of life are heaped upon the philistine he becomes bored, and against boredom he has a great many fancied remedies—balls, theaters, parties, clubs, cards, games, traveling, and so on. . . . The peculiar characteristic of the philistine is a dull, dry kind of gravity akin to that of brutes.

Matthew Arnold, in his "Essays," writes on the subject:

"Philistines! Perhaps we have not the words because we have so much of the thing. . . . I think we had much better take the term *Philistine* itself." A philistine is a "man who regards the possession of practical conveniences as something sufficient in itself, or something that compensates for the absence or surrender of the idea of reason." "Philistia has come to be thought by us the true Land of Promise, and it's anything but that; the born lover of ideas, the born hater of common places, must feel in this country, that the sky over his head is of brass and iron."

Perhaps the best expression of the ludicrous triviality and banal commonplace of silly, meaningless platitudes is conveyed by the following verse from "Mother Goose":

When Bessie Brooks and Tommy Snooks
Went out on a Sunday,
Said Tommy Snooks to Bessie Brooks
"To-morrow will be Monday."

The philistine is laughed at as the fool.

When *Falstaff* is entrapped for the last time by *Mrs. Ford* and pinched and burned by the supposed fairies, *Mrs. Ford* finally, in a burst of laughter, exclaims:

Sir John, we have had ill luck; we could never meet. I will never take you for my love again; but I will always count you my deer.

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Fal. I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass.

Ford. Ay, and an ox, too; both the proofs are extant.

Shakespeare, in his "Midsummer Night's Dream," raises the laugh on *Quince* in the prologue before the Athenian duke, *Theseus*, by making the poet carpenter stop on the wrong points and thus convey the reverse meaning of what was intended. The speech is ridiculed by having it turned through wrong stops into nonsense.

Enter Quince for the Prologue.

Pro. If we offend thee, it is with our good will.

That you should think, we come not to offend,

But with good will. To show our simple skill,

That is the true beginning of our end.

Consider, then, we come but in despite.

We do not come, as minding to content you,

Our true intent is. All for your delight,

We are not here. That you should here repent you,

The actors are at hand; and, by their show,

You shall know all, that you are like to know.

The. This fellow does not stand upon points. . . .

His speech was like a tangled chain; nothing impaired,
but all disordered. . . .

Shakespeare then presents the silly prologue, introduces the characters of the play, and tells the whole stupid plot, full of dull, meaningless alliterations such as:

Whereat, with blade, with bloody blameful blade,

He bravely broach'd his boiling bloody breast;

And Thisby, tarrying in mulberry shade,

His dagger drew, and died. For all the rest,

Let Lion, Moonshine, Wall, and lovers twain

At large discourse, while here they do remain.

*Exeunt Prologue, Pyramus, Thisbe, Lion, and Moon-
shine.*

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The. I wonder if the lion be to speak.

Demetrius. No wonder, my lord: one lion may, when many asses do.

Here the ridicule consists in making of the actors fools and asses. Thus *Pyramus*, the lover of *Thisbe*:

O grim-look'd night! O night with hue so black!

O night, whichever art when day is not!

The wall introduces itself as "one *Snout* by name." Through this *Snout*, the wall, "the wittiest partition that ever I heard discourse," the two lovers make love. *Queen Hippolita* comments:

This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard.

When the *Lion* and *Moonshine* enter *Theseus* remarks:

Here come two noble beasts in, a man and a lion.

The *Lion* introduces himself to the audience:

You, ladies, you, whose gentle hearts do fear

The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor,
May now perchance both quake and tremble here,

When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar,

Then know that I, one Snug the joiner, am

A lion-fell, nor else no lion's dam;

For, if I should as lion come in strife

Into this place, 'twere pity on my life.

Moonshine introduces himself:

All that I have to say is to tell you that the lanthorn is the moon; I, the man i' the moon; this thorn-bush, my thorn-bush; and this dog, my dog.

When *Pyramus* stabs himself he declares:

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Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.
Now am I dead
Now am I fled. . . .

On this comical death *Theseus* comments:

With the help of a surgeon he might yet recover, and prove an ass.

The whole of this comic play turns on the stupidity of the performers and the silliness of the tragedy which they intend to present and which is thus made into a comedy. The tragedy has become a comedy when shown to be silly and stupid. The intelligence of the performers is below the normal, their mental activity is inferior to that of the average person. Lack of consciousness of that fact on the part of the actors makes the play all the more comic. *The comic sounds the depths of human folly.*

We may quote from Daudet's "Tartarin on the Alps":

"What a queer country this Switzerland is!" exclaimed Tartarin.

Bompard began to laugh.

"There is no Switzerland any more." . . .

"Switzerland at the present time is nothing but an immense Kursaal, to which people crowd for amusement from all parts of the world; and which is exploited by a wealthy company possessed of thousands of millions.

"You will not find a corner which is not fixed up and machined like the floor beneath the stage in the Opera: waterfalls lighted up, turnstiles at the entrances of glaciers, and for ascents of mountains, railways—either hydraulic or funicular.

"At the bottom of the crevasses there is always present

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a porter who is able to assist you up again, who will brush your clothes, shake off the snow, and respectfully inquire whether 'Monsieur has any luggage?' " . . .

On ascending Mont Blanc, the cowardly Bompard became frightened out of his wits:

"*Tartarin*," Bompard exclaimed, "I hope that you have had enough of this ludicrous expedition."

The great man opened his eyes with some anxiety in them.

"What *are* you chattering about?"

Bompard drew a picture of the thousand terrible deaths which menaced them.

"*Tartarin* interrupted him—

"You joker! And the Company? Is not Mont Blanc managed by a Company?"

"What! did you believe all that? Why, it was only a guying. Among people of Tarascon, of course—you know that what we say is—is—"

When on Mont Blanc the "brave" *Tartarin* is full of fear and trepidation of death; he makes his confession:

"Forgive me; yes, yes, forgive me. I have often been unkind to you: I have treated you as a liar—"

"What does that matter?"

"Listen to me, friend; I have never killed a lion!"

"That does not surprise me at all," replied Bompard, quickly. "But why worry yourself about such a trifle?"

What Daudet specially regards as ludicrous is vanity, conceit, deceit, folly, mendacity, simulation, silliness, stupidity and absurdity.

CHAPTER XVI

HOLY WRITS AND THE SAGES

The sacred Scriptures use ridicule as their weapon and take the fool as the target at whom the shafts of scorn are directed with power and sure aim. The psalmist sings:

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. God looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand.

They have gone back.

Surely men of low degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.

Fools because of their transgressions, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.

The Proverbs specially abound in derision and ridicule at the expense of the ignorant, the vain and the foolish.

A foolish woman is clamorous, she is simple and knoweth nothing.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes. In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride.

Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom.

Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly.

Speak not in the ears of a fool, for he will despise thy wisdom.

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The writer of the Proverbs apparently discriminated between the fool as the simpleton and the arrogant fool. The treatment of the arrogant fool is: "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit," while that of the fool-simpleton: "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him." Of the fool's wit the Proverbs pointedly remark:

The legs of the lame are not equal, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.

As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honor to a fool.

The great God that formed all things rewardeth the fool.

As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.

Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.

Even the mild Christ did not hesitate to use the fool as his butt. We all know the parable of the foolish virgins. We are not surprised to find Schopenhauer having his fling:

A wise man is wise only on condition of living in a world of fools.

We find in the world of mankind, from a moral standpoint, villainy and baseness, and, from an intellectual standpoint, incapacity and stupidity. Stupid people are generally malicious for the very same reason that the ugly and deformed are.

The fool, the defective, and even the physically deformed are put into the same category. This, however, is but the maxim of a pessimist. *The fool is not neces-*

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sarily malicious, but he is certainly ludicrous. Ignorance, silliness, lack of wit, stupidity, naïveté, stolidity, sluggishness, misapprehension, error of understanding will always be fit subjects for the shafts of ridicule and remain everlasting themes of the comic.

The "Al Koran" is not without its laugh. Thus Mohammed tells us:

When the Prophet entrusted as a secret unto one of his wives a certain accident; and when she disclosed the same, and God made it known unto him; he acquainted her with part of what she had done and forbore to upbraid her with the other part thereof. And when he had acquainted her therewith, she said, Who hath discovered this unto thee? He answered, the knowing, the sagacious God hath discovered it unto me.

The Hindoo Scriptures ridicule the priests thus:

After lying still for a year, these Brahmans, the frogs, have uttered their voices, inspired by the rain-god!

In the like vein is the "Upanishad," which compares the priests, the Brahmans, who circle round the holy fire, each holding the robe of him who walks before him, to a row of puppies, each holding in his mouth his predecessor's tail.

The holy Brahmans are compared to frogs and puppies.

The Dhammapada of the Buddhists says:

If a fool be associated with a wise man, even all his life, he will perceive the truth as little as a spoon perceives the taste of soup.

The Chinaman is grave and serious. Confucius is a Chinaman *par excellence*, as he practically formulated the

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rules of Chinese "proprieties," and has formed the mould in which Chinese character and civilization have been cast for over two thousand years. In the "Analects" we find the Chinese sage, Confucius, occasionally relaxing his grave demeanor and a smile and a laugh playing on his stern countenance at the sight of man's shortcomings:

Blade, but no bloom—or else bloom, but no produce—ay, that is the way with some.

Whenever Tez-Kunz drew comparisons from others, the Master would say, "Ah, how wise and great you must have become! Now I have no time to do that!"

Students of old fixed their eyes upon themselves; *now* they learn with their eyes upon others.

Of Wei-shang-Kau he said:

Who calls him straightforward? A person once begged some vinegar of him, and he begged it from a neighbor, and then presented him with it!

"The blossom is out on the cherry tree,
With a flutter on every spray.

Dost think that my thoughts go not out to thee?

Ah, why art thou far away!"

Commenting on these lines the Master said, "There can hardly have been much 'thought going out!' What does distance signify?"

Tsz-lu propounded a question about ministering to the spirits (of the departed). The Master replied, "Where there is scarcely the ability to minister to (living) men, how shall there be ability to minister to the spirits?"

On his venturing to put a question concerning death, he answered, "Where there is scarcely any knowledge about life, how shall there be any about death?"

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Through the intervention of Tzu-lu, Tsz-kau was being appointed governor of Pi. "You are spoiling a good man's son," said the Master.

Tsz-kung was consulting him, and asked, "What say you of a person who was liked by all in his village?"

"That will scarcely do," he answered.

"What then, if they all disliked him?"

"That, too," said he, "is scarcely enough. Better if he were liked by the good folk in the village, and disliked by the bad."

The sage Epictetus holds up moral and mental defects to ridicule. The following extracts from Epictetus are taken at random :

If we all applied ourselves as heartily to our proper business as the old fellows at Rome do to their schemes ; perhaps we, too, might make some proficiency. I know a man older than I am, and who is now superintendent of provisions at Rome. When he passed through this place on his return from exile, what an account did he give me of his former life ! and how did he promise that for the future, when he was got back, he would apply himself to nothing but how to spend the remainder of his days in repose and tranquillity. "For how few have I now remaining !" "You will not do it," said I. "When you are once got within the smell of Rome, you will forget all this, and, if you can but once again gain admittance to court, you will go in heartily rejoiced and thank God." "If you ever find me, Epictetus," said he, "putting one foot into the court, think of me whatever you please." How, after all, did he act ? Before he entered the city he was met by a billet from Cæsar. On receiving it he forgot all his former resolutions, and has ever since been heaping up one encumbrance upon another. I should be glad now to

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have an opportunity of putting him in mind of his discourse upon the road, and of saying, How much more clever a prophet am I than you!

A person was talking to me one day about the priesthood of Augustus. I say to him, "Let the thing alone, friend: you will be at great expense for nothing." "But my name," says he, "will be written in the annals." "Will you stand by, then, and tell those who read them, 'I am the person whose name is written there'? But, if you could tell everyone so now, what will you do when you are dead?" "My name will remain." "Write it upon a stone and it will remain just as well." "But pray, what remembrance will there be of you out of Nicopolis?" "But I shall wear a crown of gold." "If your heart is quite set upon a crown, take and put on one of roses, for it will make the prettier appearance."

Such a one is happy. He walks with a numerous train. Well, I join myself with the crowd, and I, too, walk with a numerous train.

An acquaintance of mine, for no reason, had determined to starve himself to death. I went the third day, and inquired what was the matter. He answered, "I am determined." Well: but what is your motive? for, if your determination be right, we will stay and assist your departure; but, if unreasonable, change it—"We ought to keep our determinations." What do you mean, sir? not all; but such as are right. Else, if you should just now take it into your head that it is night, if you think fit, do not change; but persist, and say, "We ought to keep our determinations."

With difficulty this person was, however, at last convinced; but there are some at present whom there is no convincing. So that now I think I understand, what before

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I did not, the meaning of that common saying, that a fool will neither bend nor break. May it never fall to my lot to have a wise, that is an intractable, fool for my friend.

There are some things which men confess with ease; others, with difficulty. No one, for instance, will confess himself a fool, or a blockhead; but, on the contrary, you will hear every one say, "I wish my fortune was equal to my mind." But they easily confess themselves fearful, and say, "I am somewhat timorous, I confess; but in other respects you will not find me a fool."

Do you not often see little dogs caressing and playing with each other, that you would say nothing could be more friendly; but to learn what this friendship is, throw a bit of meat between them, and you will see. Do you, too, throw a bit of an estate between you and your son, and you will see that he will quickly wish you underground, and you him; and then you, no doubt, on the other hand, will exclaim, "What a son I have brought up! He would bury me alive!" Throw in a pretty girl, and the old fellow and the young one will both fall in love with her.

Were not Eteocles and Polynices born of the same mother and of the same father? Were they not brought up, and did they not live and eat and sleep together? Did they not kiss and fondle each other? So that anyone who saw them would have laughed at all the paradoxes which philosophers utter about love. And yet, when a kingdom, like a bit of meat, was thrown betwixt them, see what they say, and how eagerly they wish to kill each other.

Even the stoic, Marcus Aurelius, is not above the use of ridicule. Thus he tells us in his "Meditations":

Wheresoever thou mayest live, there it is in thy power to live well and happy. But thou mayest live at the Court? There then *also* mayest thou live well and happy.

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Schopenhauer is lavish in ridicule. Of the many examples found in his writings we may take the one in which he contrasts the successful, "clever man" with the intellectual man who, in the opinion of the world, appears as lacking in "common" sense:

The clever man, when he converses, will think less of what he is saying than of the person with whom he is speaking; for then he is sure to say nothing which he will afterwards regret; he is sure not to lay himself open, nor to commit an indiscretion. But his conversation will never be particularly interesting.

An intellectual man readily does the opposite, and with him the person with whom he converses is often no more than the mere occasion of a monologue; and it often happens that the other then makes up for his subordinate rôle by lying in wait for the man of intellect, and drawing his secrets out of him.

Even the meek Tolstoy with his doctrine of non-resistance to evil cannot resist the use of ridicule in his chastisement of human folly and conceit:

Lately William II ordered a new throne for himself with some special ornaments, and, dressing himself up in a white uniform with patches, in tight trousers, and in a helmet with a bird on it, and throwing a red mantle over it, came out to his subjects. He seated himself on the throne, with full assurance that this was a necessary and important act. His subjects saw nothing funny in all this, they even found the spectacle very majestic.

The Puritan, Bunyan, in his "Pilgrim's Progress," avails himself of the power of ridicule:

World. Why, in yonder village (the village is named Morality) there dwells a gentleman whose name is Legality,

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a very judicious man, and a man of a very good name, that has skill to help men off with such burdens as thine is from their shoulders; yea, to my knowledge, he hath done a great deal of good this way; aye, and besides, he hath skill to cure those that are somewhat crazed in their wits with their burdens. To him, as I said, thou mayest go, and be helped presently. His house is not quite a mile from this place; and if he should not be at home himself, he hath a pretty young man to his son, whose name is Civility, that can do it (to speak on) as well as the old gentleman himself: there, I say, thou mayest be eased of thy burden; and if thou are not minded to go back to thy former habitation, as indeed I would not wish thee, thou mayest send for thy wife and children to thee to this village, where there are houses now standing empty, one of which thou mayest have at a reasonable rate: provision is there also cheap and good; and that which will make thy life the more happy is to be sure there thou shalt live by honest neighbors, in credit and good fashion.

They also showed him some of the engines with which some of his servants had done wonderful things. They showed him Moses' rod; the hammer and nail with which Jael slew Sisera; the pitchers, trumpets, and lamps, too, with which Gideon put to flight the armies of Midian. Then they showed him the ox-goad wherewith Shamgar slew six hundred men. They showed him also the jaw-bone with which Sampson did such mighty feats. They showed him, moreover, the sling and stone with which David slew Goliath of Gath; and the sword also with which their Lord will kill the men of sin, in the day that he shall rise up to the prey. They showed him, besides, many excellent things, with which Christian was much delighted. This done, they went to their rest again.

Talk. What you will. I will talk of things heavenly,

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or things earthly ; things moral, or things evangelical ; things sacred, or things profane ; things past, or things to come ; things foreign, or things at home ; things more essential, or things circumstantial ; provided that all be done to our profit.

Now did Faithful begin to wonder ; and stepping to Christian (for he walked all this while by himself), he said to him, but softly, What a brave companion we have got ! Surely, this man will make a very excellent pilgrim.

At this Christian modestly smiled and said, This man, with whom you are so taken, will beguile with this tongue of his twenty of them that know him not.

Faith. Do you know him then ?

Chr. Know him ? Yes, better than he knows himself.

Faith. Pray, what is he ?

Chr. His name is Talkative : he dwelleth in our town. I wonder that you should be a stranger to him ; only I consider that our town is large.

Faith. Whose son is he ? And whereabouts doth he dwell ?

Chr. He is a son of one Say-well. He dwelt in Prating Row ; and he is known to all that are acquainted with him by the name of Talkative of Prating Row ; and, notwithstanding his fine tongue, he is but a sorry fellow.

Faith. Well, he seems to be a very pretty man.

Chr. That is to them that have not a thorough acquaintance with him, for he is best abroad ; near home he is ugly enough. Your saying that he is a pretty man, brings to my mind what I have observed in the work of a painter, whose pictures show best at a distance, but very near more displeasing.

Faith. But I am ready to think you do but jest, because you smiled.

Chr. God forbid that I should jest (though I smiled) in this matter, or that I should accuse any falsely. I will give you a further discovery of him. This man is for any

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company, and for any talk; as he talketh now with you, so will he talk when he is on the ale-bench; and the more drink he hath in his crown, the more of these things he hath in his mouth. Religion hath no place in his heart, or house, or conversation; all he hath lieth in his tongue, and his religion is to make a noise therewith.

And now to the second part of the question, which concerns the tradesman you mentioned. Suppose such an one to have but a poor employ in the world, but by becoming religious he may mend his market, perhaps get a rich wife, or more and far better customers to his shop; for my part, I see no reason but this may be lawfully done. For why?

1. To become religious is a virtue, by what means soever a man becomes so.

2. Nor is it unlawful to get a rich wife, or more custom to my shop.

3. Besides, the man that gets these by becoming religious gets that which is good of them that are good, by becoming good himself; so then here are a good wife, and good customers, and good gain, and all these by becoming religious, which is good; therefore, to become religious to get all these is a good and profitable design.

The fatter the sow is, the more she desires the mire; the fatter the ox is, the more gamesomely he goes to the slaughter; and the more healthy the lustful man is, the more prone he is unto evil.

In all the extracts from "Pilgrim's Progress" we find how Bunyan with all his earnest Puritanic zeal employs ridicule in behalf of religion. We further realize that ridicule consists in assimilating the irreligious, the ungodly, the immoral, the rogue, the babbler, and the hypocrite with silliness, stupidity, meanness, conceit, deceit, and vulgarity—with the pig, the sow, and the mire.

CHAPTER XVII

IGNORANCE AND THE LUDICROUS

The ignorant and the foolish form the subject matter of the comic; they are the legitimate laughing-stock of the world. If people are unaware of their ignorance, and are naïve in their statements, the effect is ludicrous, and all the more effective when they deliver themselves about their ignorance with the infallibility of the Grand Llama.

We smile at the city woman who was surprised at seeing the process of milking for the first time. "Why," she said, "I thought a cow was milked by the twisting of her tail."

When the telegraph was first introduced, the most ludicrous ideas were entertained as to its manner of working. It was thought that the letter carrier would run on the wires and carry his mailbag with great ease. Others thought that the wires would be used for the purpose of dragging mail from station to station. "Wife," said a man, "I don't see for my part, how they send letters on them wires without tearin' 'em all to bits." "Oh, you stupid!" exclaimed the more intellectual helpmeet. "Why they don't send the paper, they just send the writin' in a fluid state."

A little darkey saw a piece of newspaper that had blown up on one of the telegraph wires and caught there. He ran into the house in great excitement and cried out:

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"Come quick! Dem wires done buss and done let all the news out!"

An Irishman heard that when one sense is underdeveloped the other is overdeveloped. "I observed it, too," he said, "when one leg is shorter the other one is longer."

A Sunday school teacher asks one of the boys, "How many commandments are there, Tom?" Tom thinks and answers, "Perhaps a hundred!" Tom then asks one of the boys what is the number of the commandments. The boy answers promptly, "Ten!"

"Oh, go on!" exclaims Tommy, "I told the teacher there was a hundred and he was dissatisfied!"

A doctor examined a young lady and told her that her liver was not in good order.

"I trust," replied the lady, "that my other liver is all right."

A doctor examined a patient and tapped him on the left side of the abdomen. The patient in his curiosity asked the doctor what he was looking for.

"I examine your spleen," answered the doctor.

"Why," exclaimed the patient, "I thought the spleen was in the head!"

Doctor: "Do you have noises in your head?"

Patient: "Sure, Oi have thim all the time an' some times I can hear thim fifty feet away!"

"Mamma," exclaimed the little city boy, "the cows chew gum!"

The ignorance and shortcomings of physicians are ridiculed in the following anecdote:

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A father brings his dumb child to the doctor for diagnosis. The child is mute. The doctor's diagnosis is, she is mute, because she lost the power of speech. When the father asks for further information, the doctor tells him that it is because she has lost control of the faculty of articulation.

A surgeon amputated a leg of one of his patients. "Is there any hope now?" asked a friend anxiously. "Not the least," said the doctor. "Why, then, make him suffer by the operation?" "Why, sir, can a physician tell a patient at once that he is doomed? We must jolly him a little."

The Greek epigram on a physician is well pointed: The sun shines on his successes and the earth covers his failures.

Similarly, ignorance, in giving faulty definitions, excites our merriment, as, for instance, the school boy who told the teacher that the side opposite the right angle of a triangle is termed "hippopotamus"; or that a mountain range is a large-sized cooking stove. A similar definition is that the pyramids (Pyrenees) are a range of mountains between France and Spain.

If we analyze such jokes more closely, we find that much that is regarded as ignorance is really silliness, dullness, and stupidity. It is, after all, the fool and his folly that are ridiculed. As Heine puts it tersely: "The folly of my fellow mortals will live forever. For there is but one wisdom, and it hath its fixed limits, but there are a thousand illimitable follies. The learned casuist and carer for souls, Schuup, even saith that in the world there are more fools than human beings."

Ignorance, stupidity, and folly are the Trimurti of the comic.

Feigned ignorance where the stupidity of the other

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person is revealed is frequently a subject of the ludicrous.

Feigning of ignorance expressed in a delicate form of ridicule elevated to the sublime regions of philosophy is found in the "Dialogues" of the great philosopher and artist, Plato. We may take for examination a few examples. *Socrates* ridicules the Sophist, *Protagoras*, and his enthusiastic admirers:

Last night or rather very early in the morning, *Hippocrates* gave a tremendous thump with his staff at my door; some one opened it and he came rushing in and bawled out: *Socrates*, are you awake or asleep?

I knew his voice and said: *Hippocrates*, is that you? and do you bring any news?

Good news, he said; nothing but good.

Delightful, I said; but what is the news? and why have you come hither at this unearthly hour?

He drew nearer to me and said: *Protagoras* is come.

(*Socrates* took it coolly). Yes, I replied, he came two days ago. Have you only just heard of his arrival?

Yes, by the gods, he said, but not until yesterday morning. *Protagoras* is come. I was going to you at once, and then I thought that the night was far spent. But the moment sleep left me, I got up and came hither direct.

I, who know the very courageous madness of the man, said: What is the matter? Has *Protagoras* robbed you of anything?

He replied laughing: Yes, indeed, he has, *Socrates*, of the wisdom which he keeps from me.

But surely, I said, if you give him money, and make friends with him, he will make you as wise as himself.

After some discussion, in which *Socrates* makes *Hippocrates* look sheepish for the rash decision to be instructed by a Sophist, he finally takes the young man

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over to the house of the wealthy *Callias*, where *Protagoras* stays as a guest. With one artistic touch Plato ridicules the Sophists who crowd at the doors of wealthy people.

And I think that the doorkeeper, who was a eunuch, and who was probably annoyed at the great inroad of the Sophists, must have heard us talking. At any rate, when we knocked at the door, and he opened and saw us, he grumbled: They are Sophists—he is not at home; and instantly gave the door a hearty bang with both his hands. Again we knocked, and he answered without opening: Did you hear me say that he is not at home, fellows? But, my friend, I said, you need not be alarmed; for we are not Sophists, and we are not come to see *Callias*; but we want to see *Protagoras*; and I must request you to announce us. At last, after a good deal of difficulty, the man was persuaded to open the door.

When we entered *Protagoras* was taking a walk in the court. A train of listeners followed him; the greater part of them appeared to be strangers whom *Protagoras* had brought with him out of the various cities visited by him in his journeys, he, like *Orpheus*, attracting them by his voice and they following.

Plato thus ridicules the magic which *Protagoras* exercises on the stupefied men, and then represents the ludicrous scene of the folly, of the adoration of their master, and of the blind, irrational following commanded by the archsophist.

Nothing delighted me more than the precision of their movements: they took such care never to come in his way at all; but when he and those who were with him turned back, then the band of listeners parted regularly on either side; he was always in front, and they wheeled round and took their places behind him in perfect order.

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After the introduction is over and *Protagoras* finds that a new wealthy pupil is brought to him he exhibits his skill in oratory by going off into a long and windy oration which *Socrates* ridicules with his powerful, though delicate and almost imperceptible irony and humor.

Protagoras ended

So charming left his voice, that I the while

Thought him still speaking, still stood fixed to hear.

At length when the truth dawned upon me that he had really finished, not without difficulty I began to collect myself, and, looking at Hippocrates, I said to him: O son of Apollodorus, how deeply grateful I am to you for having brought me hither; I would not have missed the speech of Protagoras for a great deal.

Then with his refined, delicate irony Socrates proceeds to entangle *Protagoras* in the meshes of his dialectic.

I have one small difficulty which I am sure that Protagoras will easily explain, as he has already explained so much. If a man were to go and consult Pericles or any of our great speakers about these same matters, he might perhaps hear as fine a discourse; but then when one has a question to ask of any of them, like books, they can neither answer nor ask: and if anyone challenges the least particular of their speech, they go ringing on in a long harangue, like brazen pots which when they are struck continue to sound unless someone puts his hand upon them; whereas our friend, Protagoras, can not only make a good speech, as he has already shown, but when he is asked a question, he can answer briefly; and when he asks, he will wait and hear the answer and this is a very rare gift.

After *Protagoras* is caught in the net of Socratic dialectics he refuses to continue the discussion, the other

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great Sophists present exhort him not to interrupt the argument. At the same time they take occasion to show off, and hit *Protagoras*, the famous Sophist. Plato, with his genius for the humorous, depicts this sophistic vanity intertwined with the feelings of rivalry. Plato takes occasion to ridicule the finely spun cobwebs, distinctions, and platitudes for which *Prodicus* was so famous, and also the well-known *Hippias* with his cosmopolitanism, meanwhile exhibiting the Sophists in a ludicrous light.

Prodicus said: Those who are present at such discussions ought to be impartial hearers of both the speakers, remembering however that impartiality is not the same as equality, for both sides should be impartially heard, and yet an equal meed should not be assigned to both of them; but to the wiser a higher meed should be given, and a lower to the less wise. And I as well as Critias would beg you, Protagoras and Socrates, to grant our request, which is that you will argue with one another and not wrangle; for friends argue with friends out of good will, but only adversaries and enemies wrangle. And then our meeting will be delightful; for in this way you, who are the speakers, will be most likely to win esteem, and not praise only, among us who are your audience; for esteem is a sincere conviction of the hearers' souls, but praise is often an insincere expression of men uttering falsehoods contrary to their convictions. And thus we who are the hearers will be gratified and not pleased; for gratification is of the mind when receiving wisdom and knowledge, but pleasure is of the body when eating or experiencing some other bodily delight. Thus spoke Prodicus, and Socrates adds "many of the company applauded his words."

This speech made by *Prodicus* reminds one of the silly pedantic themes and briefs made by instructors and pro-

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fessors of English composition in our "foremost" American colleges.

A little volume on English composition, used as a text-book in one of the leading Eastern colleges, among other recipes for literary style, or the concoction of fine English phrases and polite letter-writing, gives gravely the advice that in a letter "The salutation should be written flush (? !) with the left-hand margin." As a climax the book concludes with directions as to the all-important position of the postage-stamp (!) : "The postage-stamp should be attached in the upper right-hand corner. It should be right side up, and its edges should be parallel to the edges of the paper." (!)

Here is a specimen of rules on "briefing," taken from a college text-book on argumentation, an interesting specimen of logical acumen and clearness of thought: "In briefing the refutation always state the first assertion that is to be refuted with such connectives, as, 'Although it is urged . . . yet the conclusion is unsound, for . . .,' 'Although the case is cited . . . yet the case is irrelevant, for . . .'" Whatever our modern educational institutions lack, they are not deficient in a certain amount of unconscious dry humor.

Plato then ridicules the grandiloquent, cosmopolitan sage *Hippias*:

All of you who are here present I reckon to be kinsmen and friends and fellow citizens, by nature and not by law; for by nature like is akin to like, whereas law is the tyrant of mankind, and often compels us to do many things which are against nature. How great would be the disgrace then, if we, who know the nature of things, and are the wisest of Hellenes, and who, bearing such a high character, are met together in this city, which is the metropolis of wisdom,

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and in the greatest and most glorious house of this city, should have nothing to show worthy of this height of dignity, but should only quarrel with one another like the meanest of mankind! Let us be your peacemakers. And do not you, Socrates, aim at this precise and extreme brevity in discourse, but loosen and let go the reins of speech, that your words may be grander and more becoming to you. (And here is a stab at his rival Protagoras.) Neither do you, Protagoras, go forth on the gale with every sail set out of sight of land, into an ocean of words.

In "Euthydemus" Plato again ridicules the Sophists by comparing them to prize-fighters and boxers, the idols of our American public, crowds and mobs.

Crito. Neither of them are known to me, Socrates; they are a new importation of Sophists, as I should imagine. Of what country are they and what is the line of their wisdom?

Soc. As to their origin, I believe that they are natives of this part of the world, and have migrated from Chios to Thurii; they were driven out from Thurii and have been living for many years past in these regions. ' As to their wisdom, about which you ask, Crito, they are wonderful—consummate! I never knew what the true boxer and athlete was before; they are simply made up of fighting, not like the two Acharnanian brothers, who fight with their bodies only, but this pair of brothers, besides being perfect in the use of their bodies, are invincible in every sort of warfare. For they are capital in fighting in armor, and will teach the art to anyone who pays them. They are also most skilful in legal warfare; they themselves will plead and teach others to speak and compose speeches which will have an effect upon the courts. And this was only the beginning of their wisdom, but they have at last carried out the athletic art to the very end, and have mastered

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the only mode of fighting which had hitherto been neglected by them. No one dares even to stand up against them, such is their skill in the war of words, that they can refute any proposition whether true or false.

Socrates then goes on with his story, in which he holds up the two Sophists to ridicule:

I saluted the brothers, whom I had not seen for a long time: and then I said to *Cleinias*: Here are two wise men, wise not only in a small, but in a large way of wisdom, for they know all about war—all that a good general ought to know about the array and command of an army, and the whole art of fighting in armor; and they know about law, too, and can teach a man how to use the weapons of the courts when he is injured.

They heard me say this, but only despised me. I observed that they looked at one another, and both of them laughed; and then *Euthydemus* said: Those, *Socrates*, are matters which we no longer pursue seriously; to us, they are secondary occupations.

Indeed, I said, if such occupations are regarded by you as secondary, what must the principal one be; tell me I beseech you what the noble study is?

The teaching of virtue, *Socrates*, he replied, is our principal occupation; and we believe we can impart it better and quicker than any man.

My God! I said, and where did you learn that? I always imagined, as I was saying just now, your chief accomplishment to be the art of fighting in armor. But now if you really have the other knowledge, O forgive me: I address you as I would superior beings, and ask you to pardon the impiety of my former expressions. But are you quite sure about it? The promise is so vast that a feeling of incredulity steals over me.

You may take our word, *Socrates*, for the fact.

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Thus does Plato in the person of *Socrates* expose to ridicule the conceit and folly of the "wise" Sophists. The whole Socratic irony consists in the fact that by a method of self-humiliation and reasoning he exposes the self-delusion and the imposition of the Sophists who claim wisdom while manifesting only conceit and folly. What *Socrates* ridicules is the *sham wisdom*, the stupidity of the Sophists.

In his "Symposium," which is full of the fire of genius, both from an artistic and philosophical standpoint, Plato handles the more delicate shades of the ludicrous with the consummate skill of an artist. At a banquet given by *Agathon*, among many other speakers, the physician, *Eryximachus*, delivers his speech on love, which, according to him, is the harmony of opposites. Meanwhile *Aristophanes*, the great comic writer, is seized by a fit of the hiccoughs, which is treated by *Eryximachus*. When the physician is through with his speech on the harmony of love he turns to *Aristophanes*, saying:

You, *Aristophanes*, may now supply the omission or take some other line of commendation; for I perceive that you are rid of the hiccough.

Yes, said *Aristophanes*, the hiccough is gone; not however until I applied the sneezing; and I wonder whether the harmony of the body has a love of such noises and ticklings, for I no sooner applied the sneezing than I was cured.

Eryximachus said: Beware, friend *Aristophanes*, although you are going to speak, you are making fun of me; and I shall have to watch your speech and see whether I cannot have a laugh at you.

You are quite right, said *Aristophanes*, laughing. I

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will unsay my words; but do you please not to watch me, as I fear that in the speech which I am about to make, instead of others laughing with me, which is the manner born of our muse, I shall only be laughed at.

Aristophanes, then in his humorous way, represents the perfect primeval man spinning like a top and running on all fours, something like the monstrous half beastly gods of the barbarians, with four hands, two faces, and Janus-like in form. When these men, half human, half brutes, became too insolent *Zeus*, with Greek cunning and Aristophanic humor, splits them in two.

"Men," said the father of gods, "shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two and then they will diminish in strength and be increased in numbers; this will have the advantage of making them more profitable to us. They shall walk upright and if they continue insolent and will not be quiet I will split them again and they shall hop on a single leg." Each of us when separated, having one side only like a flat fish, is but the indenture of a man, and he is always looking for his other half.

With comic piety *Aristophanes* calls on men to be reverent and obedient to the gods.

If we are not obedient to the gods, there is a danger that we shall be split up again and go about in basso-relievo, like the profile figures having only half a nose, and that we shall be like tallies. Wherefore let us exhort all men to piety, that we may avoid evil and obtain the good.

In spite of all his conservatism *Aristophanes* cannot help having his jibe at gods, men, and the feeling of piety so dear to the ancients, and he concludes:

This, Eryximachus, is my discourse of love which I

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must beg you to leave unassailed by the shafts of your ridicule.

The physician hardly could make the oration more comic. The human and divine were both, with that semi-serious laughter characteristic of the subtle intellect of the Greek, presented in a self-seeking, ignoble, animal-like, jumping-jack-like, and stupid aspect. The primeval "perfect" man spins on all fours; then man is split, like a fish, always looking for his missing mate. The future man may go about in basso relievo, be a mere profile of man with half a nose, while the gods will reap the profit of multiplied sacrifices.

Plato then ridicules the pompous style of the rhetoric of *Gorgias* and his disciples. He represents it as a silly, melodramatic, and meaningless piling of words and heaping of sentences without rhyme or reason. And then concludes *Agathon's* Gorgian speech on love with the following dithyrambic:

Love is the fairest, best, and the cause of what is fairest and best. And there comes into my mind a line of poetry in which he is said to be the god who

Gives peace on earth and calms the stormy deep,
Who stills the winds and bids the sufferer sleep.

This is he who empties men of disaffection and fills them with affection, who makes them to meet together at banquets such as these: in sacrifice, feasts, dances, he is our lord, who sends courtesy and sends away discourtesy, who gives kindness ever, and never gives unkindness; the friend of the good, the wonder of the wise, the amazement of the gods; desired by those who have no part in him, and precious to those who have the better in him; parent of delicacy, luxury, desire, fondness, softness, grace; regardful of the good, regardless of the evil: in every work, wish,

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fear—saviour, pilot, comrade, helper; glory of gods and men, leader, best and brightest: in whose footsteps let every man follow, sweetly singing in his honor and joining in that sweet strain with which love charms the souls of gods and men.

At the end of the speech there was the usual cheer. *Socrates*, with his customary ironical bantering, humor and ridicule, exclaims in mock confusion:

Why, my dear friend, must not I or any one be in a strait who has to speak after he has heard such a rich and varied discourse? I am especially struck with the beauty of the concluding words—who could listen to them without amazement? When I reflected on the immeasurable inferiority of my own powers, I was ready to run away for shame, if there had been a possibility of escape. For I was reminded of Gorgias, and at the end of his speech I fancied that Agathon was shaking at me the *Gorginian* or *Gorgonian* head of the great master of rhetoric, which was simply to turn me and my speech into stone, as Homer says, and strike me dumb.

By pointing out his own foolishness he really hints at the folly of the Sophists and their ignorance of the subject under discussion.

And then I perceived how foolish I had been in consenting to take my turn with you in praising love, and saying that I, too, was a master of the art, when I really had no conception how anything ought to be praised. For in my simplicity I imagined that the topics of praise should be true. And I felt quite proud, thinking that I knew the nature of true praise, and should speak well. Whereas I now see that the intention was to attribute to Love every species of greatness and glory, whether really belonging to him or not, without regard to truth or falsehood—that

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was no matter. For the original proposal seems to have been not that each of you should really praise Love, but only that you should appear to praise him. And so you attribute to Love every imaginable form of praise which can be gathered anywhere; and you say "he is all this" and the "cause of all that," making him appear the fairest and the best of all to those who knew him not, for you cannot impose upon those who know him.

Here *Socrates*, in his ridicule, lays bare the sources of the comic—imposition, stupidity, and folly.

Plato concludes his "Symposium" with the playful irony:

Aristodemus was only half awake (all of the carousers fell asleep and he did not hear the beginning of the discourse led by Socrates and listened to by Agathon and Aristophanes). The chief thing which Aristodemus remembered was Socrates compelling the other two to acknowledge that the genius of comedy was the same as that of tragedy, and that the true artist in tragedy was an artist in comedy also. To this they were constrained to assent, being drowsy, and not quite following the argument.

The mean, the low, and the ignoble, the defective and the proud, conceited, ignorant, and the foolish, unaware of themselves, are legitimate prey for the searchlight of one who has superior insight. They are ludicrous subjects for the merriment and laughter of the spectator. Wherever we find lack of judgment and intelligence, where such are expected, we cannot restrain our smiles and laughter. Ignorance, naïveté, silliness, imbecility, absentmindedness, absurdity, foolishness, human folly in general form the ingredients of the ludicrous and the comic. In our analysis of jokes,

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jest, puns, banter, burlesque, humor, raillery, anecdotes, farce, fun, irony, and witticisms we find that it is the witless and the fool who form the central characters of laughter.

As illustrations we may take the following jokes:

During a discussion at a meeting a speaker mentioned the extraordinary circumstance that, in China, if a man were condemned to death he could easily hire a substitute to die for him; "and I believe," continued the debater, "that many poor fellows get their living by acting as substitutes in that way."

"How far is it to Cork?" asked a stranger.

"Six miles," was the reply; "but, sure, if you walk fast you can make it in four."

An Irish officer, who had been in India many years and enjoyed the best of health, could not bear to hear the Indian climate run down as it usually is.

"A lot of young fellows," he said, "come out here, and they drink and they eat, and they eat and they drink, and they die. And then they go home and say that it was the climate that did it!"

"Sure," said Pat, pointing toward his heart, "'twas here where I was struck with the inimies' bullet, and——"

"Ay, man," interrupted Sandy, "if ye had been shot through the heart you wad a been kilt."

"Begorra, ye spalpeen," retorted Pat, "at the toime I was shot me heart was in me mouth."

An officer, who was inspecting his company, spied one private whose shirt was sadly begrimed.

"Patrick O'Flynn!" called the captain.

"Here, your honor!" promptly responded Patrick, with his hand to his cap.

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"How long do you wear a shirt?"

"Twenty-eight inches," was the rejoinder.

An Irishman, who was to undergo trial for theft, was being comforted by his priest.

"Keep up your heart, Dennis, my boy. Take my word for it, you'll get justice."

"Troth, yer riverence," replied Dennis in an undertone, "an' that's just what I'm afraid of."

In all these examples we find ignorance, stupidity, and imbecility exposed to laughter and ridicule. The fool and his folly are at the very heart of the ludicrous.

CHAPTER XVIII

SUGGESTION AND THE COMIC

We have referred to the fact that the appreciation of a joke or of anything ridiculous depends on the audience. The same joke which sends one audience into convulsions of uproarious laughter meets with indifference and even disapprobation and hisses from a crowd under different circumstances. Education, race, religion, nationality, industrial and political interests, class and professional prejudices must all be taken into consideration. An ancient Hebrew, Greek, Roman, modern European, Chinaman, Hindoo, Zulu, Protestant, Catholic, Jew, Mohammedan, capitalist, workman, artist, physician, engineer, all of them have their special jokes, pleasantries, and play, which appeal to particular people and to no others.

Conditions and circumstances should be taken into consideration. On solemn occasions, in cases of devotion and loyalty, or in times of grief and misfortune, the making of jokes and manifestations of mirth and laughter are not only unappreciated, but are even resented. "As the grating of the pot under a pot so is the laughter of fools." Jests and jokes out of time and place not only show the absence of sympathy, but also the lack of understanding, and are often turned against the person who made them. The laughter-rousing activity, like all human activities, must have its function and fit into the

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general organic system of social relations. The joke must not be offensive to the people in whom we wish to arouse laughter. The joke should be made at the proper time and when the people are ready for the ludicrous.

The social element and the psychological moment are possibly the most important factors in the appreciation of the ludicrous. There are times when people are ready to burst out into laughter at the slightest provocation. It remains for man to tap his audience, take aim and fire off his joke or jest at the proper moment. When a person makes a joke without regard to the social element and to the psychological moment the joke falls flat and the person is regarded as lacking in taste, tact, and understanding. He is regarded as a fool and people laugh, not *with* him, but *at* him. In other words, the joke is like a suggestion which must take into account the character of the person's suggestibility in order to release the special subconscious energies and get good effect.

In the comic and the ludicrous the currents of thought may be analogous and parallel, or they may be opposite, but there must be *suggestiveness* which leads to the relations of *contrasted superiority and inferiority*.

A lusty young man after he had been married a few months began to fail, and grew very feeble. One day, seeing a butcher run over a ploughed field after a bull, he asked the reason of it.

"Why," says the butcher, "it is to tame him."

"Oh," says the fellow, "let him be married; if that don't tame him I'll be hanged."

We have here a play on analogy of associations with strong suggestions of the state of the fellow and ridicule on marriage.

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An Irishman was standing near the railroad, when a freight train passed. There was a green flag on the rear of the caboose. The Irishman asked the man standing nearest him what that green flag meant. The man said: "It means another coming." A few days later, the man met the Irishman and his wife. They were wheeling a baby carriage. The carriage had a green flag on it.

A witness in a law-case was asked: "On what authority do you swear to the mare's age?"

"On the best authority."

"Then why don't you say what it is?" urged the impatient lawyer.

"I had it from the mare's own mouth."

Here we have a play on association by analogy and a suggestion of the lawyer's stupidity.

"These things in the room are very dusty," said a mistress to her servant girl.

"If you please, ma'am," said the girl, "it is not the things that are dirty, it is the nasty sun that comes in and shows the dust on the things."

We find here the elements of opposition and analogy with a strong suggestion of stupidity.

The same is found in the anecdote of the man who fed his hens on sawdust to have them lay wooden planks. A similar example is found in the story of the Irishman who fed his hens on sawdust and then said that the young chicks had wooden legs and that one of the chicks was a woodpecker. Here the analogy is carried all through the anecdote, giving rise to absurdities.

The joke is often represented as a dramatic play in which the state of inferiority is played now on one, and

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now on the other of the *dramatis personæ*. The following may be taken as examples :

An Irishman who was hit with a brick engaged a lawyer to put in a claim for \$100. The claim was granted. The lawyer gave Pat \$10. Pat with the money in his hand kept on looking hard at the bills.

"What is the matter?" said the lawyer.

"Begorra," said Pat, "I was just wondering who got hit with the brick—you or I."

A man walking along the street of a village stepped into a hole in the sidewalk and broke his leg. He engaged a famous lawyer, brought suit against the village for one thousand dollars and won the case.

After the claim was settled the lawyer sent for his client and handed him one dollar.

The man examined the dollar carefully. Then he looked up at the lawyer and said: "What's the matter with this dollar? Is it a counterfeit?"

Pat met the village doctor, who was a sportsman, and who was carrying his gun.

"Shure, Doctor," he said, "ye're a careful man, if yer physic misses 'em, ye always carry yer gun."

"Well, nurse," said the doctor, "did my prescription prove effective?"

"Shure, an' it did, sorr," was the reply. "He died this morning as quiet as a lamb."

"Don't you know that the sun will injure your brain if you expose it in that manner?" said a priest to a laborer who was busily working on the roadside with his head bare under the broiling sun. The man wiped the sweat off his forehead and looked at the clergyman. "Do you think I'd

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be doin' this all day, if I had any brains?" he said, and he gave the handle another turn.

Speaking of her boy to the priest the doting mother said, "There isn't in the barony, yer riv'rence, a cleverer lad nor Tom. Look at thim," pointing to two small chairs in the cabin. "He made thim out of his own head; and, fair, he has enough wood left to make me a big armchair."

Waiting till Pat came out of the saloon the priest accosted him thus, "Pat, didn't you hear me calling?"

"Yes, your riverence, I did, but—but I had only the price of one."

A priest, discoursing one Sunday on the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, said in error that five people had been fed with 5,000 loaves and two small fishes. It having come to the priest's knowledge that his mistake had given rise to a large amount of controversy (one Murphy declared particularly that he himself could do such a miracle), he (the clergyman) decided to rectify the mistake. Next Sunday, on concluding his sermon, he said, "I should have told you last Sunday that 5,000 people had been fed with five loaves and two small fishes." Looking down on Mr. Murphy, he said, "You could not do that, Mr. Murphy, could you?"

"Ah! sure yer riv'rence, I could aisily," he replied.

"How would you do it, Mr. Murphy?"

"Why I'd give them what was left over from last Sunday," answered Mr. Murphy.

"Now, Pat," said a magistrate sympathetically to an "old offender," "what brought you here again?"

"Two policemen, sor," was the laconic reply.

"Drunk, I suppose?" queried the magistrate.

"Yes, sor," said Pat without relaxing a muscle, "both av them."

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Two witnesses were at the Assizes in a case which concerned long continued poultry stealing. As usual nothing could be got from them in the way of evidence until the nearly baffled prosecuting counsel asked in an angry tone of voice, "Will you swear on your soul, Pat Murphy, that Mike Hooligan has never to your knowledge stolen chickens?"

The responsibility of this was too much even for Pat. "Bedad, I would hardly swear by my soul," he said, "but I do know that, if I was a chicken and Mike about, I'd roost high."

An individual of somewhat doubtful appearance was applying for a situation as a van driver. On being asked for references, he mentioned one of the dealer's old hands, who was called in and questioned as to the applicant's honesty. The referee rubbed his chin meditatively for a moment, and said, "Honest? Well, guv'nor, his honesty has been proved agin and agin. Faith, he's bin tried sivin toimes for stealing, and eschaped ivery toime!" The applicant was not engaged.

"How about reference?" inquired another mistress, after she had talked matters over with an applicant for a situation.

"Oh, Oi like yer looks, mum," said the applicant, "an' Oi won't ask yez for any."

"Bridget, I don't hardly think it is the thing for you to entertain company in the kitchen."

"Don't ye worry, mum. Sure, an' I wouldn't be afther depdroivin' ye of the parlor."

"Goodness, Jane, what a kitchen!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown. "Every pot, pan, and dish is dirty, the table is a perfect litter, and—why, it will take you all night to clean things up! What have you been doing?"

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"Sure, ma'am, explained Jane, "the young ladies has just been showin' me how they bile a pertater at their cookery school."

"Is Mrs. Wicks at home?" asked a caller.

"No, mum," said Bridget.

"Oh, I'm very sorry," said the caller.

"So am I, mum, but she's really out this time."

"And remember, Bridget, there are two things that I must insist upon—truthfulness and obedience!"

"Yes, mum," said Bridget, pointedly. "And when you tell me to tell the ladies you're out when you're in, which shall it be, mum?"

"Tintion!" exclaimed the sergeant to the platoon, "front face, and tind to rowl call! As many of ye as is prisint will say 'Here' and as many of yez as is not prisint will say 'Absent.'"

"If ye was to be stung by a wasp, Pat, phat would ye do first?" asked Mrs. Murphy.

"Howl, bedad!" was Pat's laconic reply.

"Are ye much hurt, Pat?" inquired Mike of his companion, who had met with an accident. "Do ye want a docthor?"

"A docthor, ye fule," exclaimed Pat. "After being runned over by a throlley car? Phat Oi want is a lawyer."

An Irish navvy once changed his lodgings. The following morning, when he got up, his new landlady asked him how he had slept.

"Not a wink," said Pat, as he began scratching himself.

"Why! what's the matter? There's not a single flea in the house!" snapped the landlady indignantly.

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"No, be jabbers," replied Pat, "they're all married and got children."

At a favorite watering place two Irishmen went out in a small boat, and one of them jumped into the water to have a swim. After indulging to his heart's content he was making for the boat when his companion picked up the towel, and threw it overboard to him, saying, "Shure, if ye come in jist now, yez will wet the boat, so yez had better dry yerself where yez are before coming aboard."

"Pat, why didn't you wipe the cobwebs off this champagne bottle before you brought it to the table?" said the host.

"Well, sor," replied Pat, "I thought I'd better not, as I saw you putting them on only last night, sor."

The following series of jokes may, with benefit, be studied. The inner meaning of the ludicrous is disclosed on the basis of my theory of implied relation of the superior and the inferior:

A man once received as a present from a sea captain a fine specimen of the bird which sailors call the "laughing-jackass." As he was carrying it home, he met a brawny navvy, who stopped and said to him, "What kind of burrd is that, sor?"

"That's a laughing-jackass!" explained the owner, genially.

But Pat was not to be taken in with any story of that kind, and, with a twinkle in the eye, he responded, "It's not yerself; it's the burrd Oi mane, sor!"

An Irish peasant, who was anxious to know what a phrenologist was, inquired of a friend, and received the answer, "Why a person that can tell by the feel of the bumps on your head what kind of a man you are."

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"Bumps on me head, is it!" exclaimed the peasant. "Begor, then, they'd tell him more what kind of a woman my wife is!"

"Why don't you get your ears cropped?" cried a big cabman to an Irishman who was trudging after a drove of donkeys. "They are a precious sight too long for a man."

"Are they?" said Paddy, turning round and looking his assailant fully in the face. "Then, be jabers, yours are much too short for an ass!"

"Are there any fish in the pool to-day?" asked a gentleman of an Irish peasant.

"Fish is it?" said the peasant. "It's fair polluted with them!"

A man who was much annoyed at Pat's muttering one day said, "Pat, does it never occur to you that your constant talk and muttering to yourself are a great annoyance to people who happen to be about? Why do you talk to yourself?"

"Shure, sir, Oi have two raysons for that."

"What are your reasons?"

"Wan of thim is that Oi like to talk to a sinsible man and the other is that Oi like to hear a sinsible man talk."

Edmund Burke was one day addressing a crowd in favor of the abolition of slavery. In spite of his eloquent appeals the crowd began to get hostile, and at last a rotten egg caught him full in the face. He calmly wiped his face and quietly said, "I always said that the arguments in favor of slavery were rather unsound!" The crowd roared, and from that time he was unmolested.

Barry Sullivan, the tragedian, was playing in "Richard III." When the actor came to the lines, "A horse, a horse,

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my kingdom for a horse!" someone in the pit called out, "Would a donkey do, Mr. Sullivan?"

"Yes," responded the tragedian, turning quickly on the interrupter. "Please come round to the stage room."

"And who is it lives there, Mike, in that big stone house?" inquired a tourist.

"Why," replied Mike, "that old gentleman I was telling you of, that died so suddint last winter."

An Irishman on weighing his pig exclaimed, "It does not weigh as much as I expected, and I never thought it would."

Mike, on opening his pay envelope, exclaimed, "Faith, that's the stingiest man I ever worked for."

"Phwat's the matter wid ye; didn't ye git as much as ye expected?" asked a fellow workman.

"Yis," was the reply, "but I was countin' on gittin' more than I expected."

"'Tis very fortunate," remarked Mr. Grady wisely, "that hay be not as hivy as coal."

"For whoy, Pat?"

"Shure a ton of the stuff would weigh so much thot a poor man could not afford to kape a cow."

An Irish squire, seeing a man who was engaged in painting a gate on his estate working away with unusual energy, asked, "What are you in such a hurry for, Murphy?"

"Sure, I want to get through before me paint runs out!" was the reply.

The published report of an Irish benevolent society says, "Notwithstanding the large amount paid for medicine and medical attendance, very few deaths occurred during the year."

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"My britheren," said an Irish preacher on one occasion, "there are some German philosophers who say there is no Resurrection, and, me britheren, it would be better for them German philosophers if, like Judas Iscariot, they had never been born."

An Irishman was one day hurrying along a country road in the south of Ireland, when he was met by a friend who exclaimed, "Why, Patrick, what's all your hurry to-day?"

"Och, be jabbers," replied Pat, without stopping, "I've got a long way to go, and I want to git there before I'm tired out."

"There's a man in the dinin' room, sor, makin' trouble because he can't have his regular seat," said a waiter, addressing a hotel proprietor.

"Go back, Mike, and propitiate him," said the proprietor.

"Look here, misther," said the waiter to the guest a little later, "if yez don't like the way things is run in this house, get out or I'll propitiate yez pretty lively."

In all those examples, when closely studied and their character fully realized from the standpoint of suggestiveness and allusion, we invariably find that the *subject of laughter is mental failure, stupidity, human folly, whether individual or social.*

CHAPTER XIX

THE LUDICROUS AND THE LAW OF SUGGESTION

When a mental process, instead of attaining its aim, suggests the reverse inference of what has been intended, the laugh is raised by the failure and by the mental stupidity of the person. The following is an example :

A committee was accused of not attending to its work assiduously ; only one half of the committee was doing any work, the others being idle. One of the members of the committee, an Irishman, undertook in a meeting the defence of the committee. "We are accused," he exclaimed, "that only one half of the committee is doing work, the other half being idle ; as a matter of fact the reverse is the case."

We often find that the comic writer or speaker avails himself of suggestiveness and double play. There is first present the joke or the comic situation, and this is further emphasized by its lack of comprehension which reveals the stupidity of the person who manifests it by some foolish or absurd remark. The manifestation of the double play heightens the sense of the ludicrous.

"To make a slow horse fast," advised a wag, "is not to give him to eat."

"Would not the poor beast die?" asked an Englishman with much concern.

An American in playing golf with an Englishman said jestingly that in the United States golf balls squeak when they are lost. The Englishman was amazed at such a re-

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markable invention. An hour later he came to the American and told him that the invention was really extraordinary, but he could not understand how the golf ball knew when it was lost.

Often the stupidity of the person ridiculed is manifested by having him repeat a joke. The repetition is so constructed that the point of the joke is lost or even completely perverted. This is a form of dramatic play. In the first place, a joke is introduced, thus arousing the sense of the ludicrous; and, in the second place, a character is introduced on the scene, which is raised to a climax of the ludicrous by dullness of understanding. The ludicrous is emphasized by a process of double ridicule. The factor of suggestiveness runs all through the play.

We may take the following anecdote directed against the Englishman :

An American and Englishman chanced to pass by a small country station and saw an announcement "Ten miles to town. They who cannot read should ask the gateman." The American laughed and the Englishman followed suit. On his arrival home the Englishman told of the notice and exclaimed: "How silly! Suppose the gateman were not there."

Uncle Will reads the London Times in his office. Enters young Henry.

"Why, uncle," exclaims Henry, "I see you are behind the Times!"

Uncle Will laughs at the joke. In the evening, at dinner, Uncle Will repeats the joke to his wife, "Mary, a fine joke Henry made this morning. I read the paper and Henry said, 'Why, uncle, I see you are behind the newspaper.'" Uncle Will wondered why Mary did not laugh.

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An Englishman saw an inscription on a tombstone: "Here lies an honest lawyer." No name was given, because the lawyer's name was Strange and every passerby, on seeing the inscription, would exclaim, "How Strange!" On coming home the Englishman related his experience of the nameless epitaph of the lawyer, Strange: "'Here lies an honest lawyer.' Everybody who will pass by will exclaim: 'How peculiar!'"

Jack laughed at Harry's coat because it was too short. On which Harry remarked that it would be long enough before he got another one. Later on Jack communicated the joke to his friend Tom.

"Tom," he said, "I heard a capital joke made by Harry. I told Harry that his coat was too short, and he said that it would be a long time before he got another."

"Where is the joke," asked Tom.

"Ah," exclaimed Jack, "but it was an excellent joke when Harry made it."

A man named Herring fell into a ditch. A wag passing by said: "There, Herring, you are in a fine pickle." A gentleman thick of wits heard it and told the story to his friends.

"A man by name Herring fell into a ditch and a fellow passed by and said: 'There, Herring, you are in a fine condition.'"

"Well," observed one of the company, "where is the joke?"

"It was a good one when I heard it."

We have pointed out before that a joke falls flat if addressed to people who have not the proper training, knowledge, and experience. The comedies of Aristophanes will hardly be appreciated by a Hindoo or by a

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Chinaman, nor would Boccaccio or Voltaire have been appreciated by a Greek or Roman audience. One must take into consideration the knowledge and experience of the people addressed. If the mass of associations, whether conscious or subconscious, is wanting, the whole play is lost. The joke does not call forth the appropriate associations and is either ignored or is even misunderstood. To appreciate a joke it must first of all be understood, and this presupposes the presence of conscious and subconscious associations which form the mass that apperceives the joke.

If we inspect the inner structure and function of the ludicrous, in whatever form it may be expressed, we find that these so-called apperceiving or synthetizing masses of association, whether conscious or subconscious, form the mainsprings of the joke or of the ludicrous. The force of the joke or of the ludicrous lies in the upheaval of masses of conscious and subconscious associations. All these associations must converge toward one focus in showing the low standard, the silliness of what is claimed to be normal, or what is thought to be superior.

The main force of the joke or of the situation regarded as ludicrous is the allusion, the suggestiveness, the great mass of associations of inferiority and superiority which becomes stirred up in the depths of the mind, conscious and subconscious. The stronger the allusion or the suggestiveness the greater the mass of conscious and subconscious associations. The more such associations are awakened to activity, the keener is the appreciation of the joke or of the ludicrous side of the object, of the person, or of the given situation. The allusion, the suggestiveness of the inferiority of the object laughed at forms the mainspring of the witty and the comic. In

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fact, we may say that this holds true, not only of the comic, but of all wit.

Aristotle pointed out the important fact that mental activity of the free and artistic type is one of the greatest sources of enjoyment in human life. Now, in a joke, as in all good wit, the hint is given and the rest is left to the listener or the reader. If the whole mass of associations heave up at the hint given and the target aimed at is hit by the reader or listener, the latter feels the joy of free activity accompanied with the feeling of superiority and the consciousness of inferiority of the ridiculed object. The listener has the consciousness of wisdom, and the object is an example of folly and stupidity. *This is the source of the comic.*

Putting it from a purely logical standpoint, all forms of wit, among which the comic takes its place, are what Aristotle terms *enthymems*—a syllogism in which some of the premises are omitted. *The reasoning is left to the reader.* It is the ability to realize the reasoning, to supply the missing links that forms the essence of the comic and gives a special pleasure to the readers or to the audience. The whole force of the wit, the comic, and of jokes consists in the fact that the listener is left to supplement the rest from his own mind. The supplementary systems of associations must be present in the mind, consciously or subconsciously.

The person who makes the joke must be able to reach by an appropriate phrase and allusion the association of systems. The delight of the listener consists in the fact that these associations become by an adroit and happy hit manifested in a free and easy way. In the case of the comic and of the joke the inferiority of the object, person, institution, or of the thought must

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be present, but in a veiled form. *The force is in the allusion.* The audience takes special delight in supplying the last links, in spontaneously forming the *finale* of the act or of the thought. The listener in this respect feels himself intellectually the actor and takes active part in the artistic piece of work presented to him. This delight in suggestiveness of the inferior is the soul of the comic.

Humor, irony, sarcasm, satire, various forms of jokes deal with the ludicrous and are species of wit, wit being the genus. We may in passing point out that some authors, such as Freud, for instance, have confused wit with the ludicrous. A good joke must be witty, but the witty need not concern itself with the ludicrous. Man is a mortal being, but not every mortal being is a man. Æsop's fables, the parables of the Gospels, the proverbs of the Old Testament are witty, but they do not necessarily deal with the ludicrous. In all the different forms of wit of which the ludicrous is one of the varieties allusion must be present. The factor of suggestiveness specially plays an all-important rôle in that species of wit which excites the ridiculing, the derisive laughter of man—the ludicrous.

In my "Psychology of Suggestion" I have pointed out that in the normal state indirect suggestion is specially efficacious. I formulated the law of normal suggestibility: "*Normal suggestibility varies as indirect suggestion and inversely as direct suggestion.*" This holds true in the case of all wit, of all forms of the ludicrous and the comical. The more veiled the suggestion, the greater the indirect suggestion, the higher is the effect. Along with the conscious systems of associations subconscious systems of associations must become subexcited, and the

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total effect is proportional to the amount of psycho-physiological activity brought into play by the artistic work of the person who arouses in us the sense of the ludicrous.

The joke and the comic, like all wit, are addressed both to the conscious and subconscious sides of mental life. The conscious side finds, as Aristotle has pointed out, immense satisfaction in the independent and free mental activity given by the veiled and subtle allusions, while the subconscious side is aroused to activity according to the law of normal suggestibility. The effect is especially enhanced when the two factors belonging to the conscious and the subconscious sides of human nature become inextricably intertwined. *Allusion and indirect suggestion are the two main factors that make wit pregnant with meaning and make the comic so irresistibly ludicrous when the hidden reference is a relation of inferiority and superiority.*

We can realize now why so many investigators and thinkers have misunderstood the nature of wit, the comic, and the joke. Freud regards brevity, condensation, economy of thought as the essentials of wit and the ludicrous. This is as far from the mark as possible. It is like the Aristotelian actor who explains the lightness and quickness of the flying statues of *Dædalus* by the ingenious hypothesis of their bodies being filled with quicksilver.

If condensation and economy of phraseology or of thought constitute the essence of wit and the ludicrous then an algebraical formula or geometrical theorem should be good examples of wit and the comic. "The law of gravitation," says Karl Pearson, "is a brief description of how every particle of matter in the universe is altering its motion with reference to every particle. It simply resumes, in a few brief words, the relationships

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observed between a vast range of phenomena. It economizes by stating in conceptional shorthand the routine of our perceptions which form for us the universe of gravitating matter." In fact, according to Pearson, scientific law "is a brief description in mental shorthand of as wide a range as possible of the sequences of our sense impressions." It is an economy of thought. Surely it would be absurd to class Newton's laws or the binominal theorem as wit, or regard them as a joke.

The principle of economy in science is also laid stress on by Mach. The principle of economy holds true in science as well as in business and in industry. In fact, economy holds true in all utilitarian activities of man. In the æsthetic activities, and especially in the play activities, the principles of economy break down completely. *The principle of reserve energy takes the place of economy. In all play the manifestation of surplus energy is the sole aim.* The feeling of free unimpeded activity, the consciousness of the presence of reserve, surplus energy is the predominant motive in play, in wit, and the comic.

Human stupidity, or rather a suggestion at it, a mere hint at human folly, which brings into play the inner mental resources of the audience, is sufficient to set us in a roar of laughter. We may lay it down as a fundamental law that *allusion to human stupidity is the root of all comic.* The effect of the ludicrous is greatly enhanced when along with stupidity there is also present some form of physical and moral defectiveness. If, however, one digs deep enough into the comic, the jocose, and the humorous he will invariably find human stupidity. Any example will answer the purpose. We may take the first examples that come to hand:

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"If you plaze," said an Irish recruit, to the sergeant, "I've got a splinter in the hand."

Sergeant: "Wot yer been doing? Scratchin' yer 'ead?"

A certain ingenious gentleman proposed, as the best and most effectual way of sweeping chimneys, to place a large goose at the top and then by a string tied round her feet to pull the animal gently down to the hearth. The goose would struggle against it with all her might; and during this resistance would move her wings with such force and rapidity as could not fail to sweep the chimney completely.

"Good heavens!" cried a lady present, "how cruel would that be to the poor goose!"

"Why, madam," replied the gentleman, "if you think my method brutal to the goose, a couple of ducks will do."

A silly old fellow meeting his godson asked where he was going.

"To school," replied the boy.

"That is well," said the old fellow. "There is a penny for you. Be a good boy. Mind your book, and I hope I shall live to hear you preach my funeral sermon."

This may be matched by the story of the Irish soldier who, when taken to task for cowardliness in running away from battle, replied: "I'd rather be a coward for half an hour than a corpse the rest of my born life."

"What is the difference?" asked the captain of artillery of the Archbishop Whatley, "between an archbishop and a donkey?"

Whatley gave it up and received the following reply: "The one carries his cross in front and the other in back."

"Very good, indeed," said Whatley laughing, "and now can you tell me the difference between a donkey and a captain of the artillery?"

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"No, indeed I cannot," replied the officer.

"Nor I either," rejoined Whatley.

Bassompierre, the French ambassador to Spain, was one day telling Henry IV. how he entered Madrid. "I was mounted on the very smallest mule in the world," said the ambassador.

"Ah, what an amusing sight to see the biggest ass mounted on the smallest mule!"

"I was your Majesty's representative," was the quiet rejoinder.

An Irish servant was instructed what to tell a gentleman who was expected to come a few days later. The servant soon returned and asked what she should tell the gentleman, if he should not come.

An officer gave his servant two dollar bills and told him to buy for a dollar tobacco, and provisions for the other dollar. The servant returned perplexed. He did not know for which dollar to buy tobacco and for which to buy provisions.

A fool said that his simplicity was not his fault; he was bright at birth, but his nurse exchanged him for another child who was a fool.

Recruit to officer: If I told you you were an ass, what would you do, sir?

Officer: I should put you under arrest.

Recruit: And if I only thought it?

Officer: Then I could do nothing; thoughts are invisible.

Recruit: Well, I am thinking it.

We may add that we derive a good deal of pleasure from the readiness and quickness with which a person repels all insinuations in regard to himself or in regard to anything which is near and dear to him. *Readiness of*

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reply reveals a source of free and unimpeded energy which gives us pleasure to witness on account of inner imitation with the activities of other men. When a man without a moment's notice is taken at a disadvantage and is accused of some defect we rejoice and laugh when he is able in the form of a joke or what we term repartee to turn the point of ridicule against the man who assails him. He shows that the other man does not understand, that the defect is only apparent and should be really counted to his credit, or that the defect really belongs to the assailant. A few examples may answer our purpose:

An Englishman and an Irishman were riding in a carriage and chanced to pass by a gallows. "Where would you be," said the Englishman, "if everybody had his due?"

"Alone in the carriage," was the response.

A judge threatened to fine a lawyer for contempt of court.

"I have expressed no contempt for court," said the lawyer, "on the contrary, I have carefully concealed my feelings."

A nobleman seeing the great philosopher, Descartes, enjoying a good meal, said to him sarcastically: "What! do philosophers enjoy such sweets?" "Why," replied Descartes, "do you fancy that nature has produced all its good things only for fools?"

In the first joke the suggestion of the criminality of the Irishman is answered by the suggestion that the real criminal is the Englishman. In the second example the lawyer, while denying in so many words the contempt of court for which he is threatened with a fine, really affirms by indirect suggestion his actual contempt of the

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judge. In the third example, Descartes points out the folly of the nobleman. This action and reaction, this play of opposites, of contrasts, affirming by denying and denying by affirming, constitute an important element of all wit, joke, and the comic. Really what we have here is the playful manifestation of the fundamental factor of what we have termed suggestiveness. Like a lambent flame the joke plays around the subject and suggests, consciously and subconsciously, possible, vague, distant associations of moral and mental inferiority.

The late Bishop Williams of Connecticut was sitting in a box in an opera house where collegiate commencement exercises were being held. The toilettes of the ladies were extremely *décolleté*. After looking round the house with an opera glass one of the ladies exclaimed: "Honestly, Bishop Williams, did you ever see anything like it in your life?"

"Never," gravely replied the Bishop. "Never, madam, since I was weaned."

Here the insinuation was naïvely made that the Bishop had seen such immoral sights before. The Bishop in self-defence had to say "no." The sting, however, of the ridicule is added and is directed against the audience of women. Instead of simply replying, "No, I have never seen anything so bad and immoral," he puts the negative reply in an affirmative form, denying and affirming such a spectacle. "I have not seen it since I was weaned." Such a state was only seen by him when nursing at his mother's breast. This further gives rise to a vast number of associations, all tending to bring out the inappropriateness, the shamelessness of the women who expose themselves without having the pure motives of motherhood. In other words, it is a spectacle not fit for

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adults, but only for babies and sucklings. At the same time there are *dissociation* of the exhibition from all dignified human life and *association* with the purposes of nursing. These women are stupid and silly and behave like wet-nurses. The ridicule is directed against the woman whose person, dissociated from the beautiful, becomes associated with wet-nurses and sucklings. The sting of the ridicule is against the attire of the women, which is fit for nursing purposes; such *décolleté* is fit only for the gaze of innocent infants. In other words, the attire is ugly and stupid, and shows the mental inferiority of the women who dress in such an inappropriate and silly fashion.

"I am willing," exclaimed the candidate, "to trust the people."

"Great Scott!" yelled a man in the audience. "I wish you'd open a grocer's shop."

Here we have the pun on the word "trust" with the strong suggestion that the candidate had better turn store-keeper or grocer, and with the indirect suggestion of the candidate being what the French term *épicier* (grocer) or philistine. In other words, the candidate is stupid.

Misapprehension, stupidity, and ignorance, various forms of mental inferiority, form the butt of ridicule. The effect is specially ludicrous when both the one who criticizes and the one who is criticized are involved in the dramatic action, one playing the part to bring out the fault of the other.

A good old-fashioned darkey was bitterly complaining about the delinquencies of her niece who had greatly offended her sense of propriety. When asked, "Dinah, can Mabel read and write?" she looked scornfully at her mistress

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and answered: "Yes'm, she got a fine edgecaeshun; that's the reason she's sich a fool and ain't got no sense!"

There is the laughter at the ignorance and stupidity of what the darkey misapprehends by education. There is laughter at the one who gets such an education. At the same time, in the background of our consciousness or subconsciousness there is lurking the suspicion that a good deal that goes under the name of education is nothing but silly stupefaction of natural good sense. Education in the ordinary sense is associated with increase of knowledge and of wisdom, but there is a good deal of education which deprives one of *original* thinking and makes of one an *educated fool*.

At a trial for murder the counsel for the accused asked the examining physician if prussic acid was not sometimes spontaneously evolved from the stomach. "I do not know," answered the witness, "but if it be so, it must be very dangerous to have a stomach."

The lawyer, as is usual with his tribe, wishes to confuse the physician by some clever puzzling question and so to discredit the physician before the jury both as to intelligence and knowledge. The reply of the physician, when fully developed, is to the effect that the counsel's question displays ignorance and shows that he is stupid. Prussic acid is one of the most powerful poisons for the organism. If the stomach should give rise to prussic acid, the stomach, one of the most important animal organs requisite for the normal nutrition and life of the organism, would not only be useless, but would be a positive danger to the individual. The counsel thinks he is a clever man, but he is really ignorant and stupid.

CHAPTER XX

WIT AND RIDICULE

Wit often employs metaphor, double sense, equivocation, and brevity, so as to play with the audience, give information, and make it think. Aristotle, who had analyzed so many different forms of thought, refers also to wit, though in a rather incoherent and incomplete way. In his "Rhetoric" he says: "Also the greatest number of elegancies arise from metaphor, and from additionally deceiving the hearer (more correctly surprising the hearer's expectation); for the point becomes more clear that he has learned something from the meaning being opposite of what it was supposed, and the mind seems to say, 'How true is this! I, however, was wrong.'"

The arousal of subconscious ideas by means of similarity and contrast, by synonyms, homonyms, and antonyms constitutes the essence of wit. "In all such cases," says Aristotle, "if one introduce the term appropriately under an equivocation or metaphor then there is wit. The same, too, is that commended saying of Anaxandrides, 'It is honorable to *die* before doing aught worthy *death*'; for it is the same as saying, 'It is worthy a man to die when he is not worthy the punishment of death, when he has not committed acts worthy that punishment.' Now the form of the diction of these sentences is the same; but in proportion as the idea happens to be enunciated in fewer words and with antithesis, in the

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same proportion is it more approved. And the reason is that the information becomes by means of the antithesis fuller; by means of brevity more rapid." In another place Aristotle displays rather unusual contempt for the hearer as he tells us that one should be brief, to the point, and not put many questions "*by reason of the imbecility of the hearer. On which account we ought as much as possible to compress even our enthymems.*" The principal object of good wit is not to confuse the listener, but to stir him up, to make him think and to bring about the right exercise of the mental powers which is one of the greatest pleasures of man.

Wit employs double sense, equivocations, metaphors, simile, brevity. Still all these are but the implements, not the essence, not the actual spirit of true wit. These implements may be used in the construction of sentences which are thoroughly flat, silly, and stupid. The characteristic of wit is the sudden, unexpected realization of new and strange views brought by simple means within the mental horizon of the audience, or the realization of something customary, usual, habitual, and familiar bearing the aspect of the unhabitual, unusual, unc customary, and strange. Wit should therefore be regarded as a form of words and sentences which suddenly opens a new horizon, gives a surprising, sudden new view, accompanied by an agreeable shock, stirring up to activity masses of mental and emotional systems with their subconscious reserve energy, arousing feelings of power due to greater mental activity, deeper insight into things, and wider knowledge of the world. Wit, therefore, does not deal with the ludicrous only, it may touch on the grave, and, in fact, it often does deal with serious matters of human life.

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The main thing, however, is the fact that in wit we experience a sudden, unexpected, surprising arousal of subconscious reserve energy. *The force in all wit is the sudden stimulation of mental activity.* In wit the saying is brief, pithy, not only because the hearer is usually stupid, but because the hearer is supposed to be stimulated to do thinking for himself and to be able to draw conclusions independently. The pleasure derived from wit is *self-activity*, the arousal of subconscious reserve energy. The person who hears a witty saying, realizes the meaning, and is enabled to draw the hidden inferences, feels stronger mentally, experiences an uplifting of the spirit.

The object of wit, as I pointed out, is stimulation of subconscious reserve energy, the calling forth of mental self-activity. The pleasure consists in the free, spontaneous activity due to the stirring of his subconscious, reserve energy. The function of wit is to widen the sphere of human thought, to strengthen his energies, and to call forth in him the joy of being, action, and life. In this respect wit is similar to ridicule, but wit radically differs from ridicule by the fundamental characteristic of the absence of and emphasis on relations of inferiority. There is present in wit the feeling of joy due to an increase of being and activity, development, and growth of mental life, but without any relation of inferiority; there is in wit the presence of excellence of spirit without the relation of degradation.

We have pointed out the fundamental error made by many writers on the subject of laughter in that they confuse wit with ridicule, the ludicrous, and the comic. They consider the witty as something inherently laughter-raising, and hence they identify the witty with the

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joke, the jest, and ridicule. This is a radical error. Wit and ridicule are by no means identical. Ridicule falls under the category of wit, but the witty may have nothing to do with ridicule. There are witty sayings, anecdotes, and stories in which the ludicrous has no place. Many folk proverbs, the proverbs and parables of the Bible, Æsop's or Hindoo fables are witty, but they lack the element of the ludicrous. Similarly, charades, puzzles, enigmas are witty, but we cannot regard them as having even a shadow of ridicule. Plato's myth of the creation and education of man, as told by him in his "Protagoras," may be considered not only as beautiful, but also as witty, although there is not a grain of ridicule in it. The simile of the soul to a charioteer and two horses in "Phædrus," the story of *Gyges* in the "Republic," the metaphor of Love in the "Symposium," as an immortal dæmon born of *Poros* or Plenty and *Penia* or Poverty, may all be regarded as excellent illustrations of good wit from which ridicule is entirely absent.

As an illustration of our point of view we may take the story told by Aristotle in his "Politics" of *Eubulus*, who, when *Autophradates* was going to besiege Atarneus, told him to consider how long the operation would take, and then reckon up the cost which would be incurred in time. "'For,' *Eubulus* said, 'I am willing for a smaller sum than that to leave Atarneus at once.' " These words of *Eubulus* made an impression on *Autophradates*, and he desisted from the siege. Aristotle also mentions the story of the tyrant *Periander*, when the herald was sent by *Thrasybulus* to ask counsel of him in regard to government. *Periander* said nothing, took the herald to the field, and cut off the tallest ears and brought the field to a level. The herald did not understand the meaning of

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the action, but came and reported to *Thrasybulus* what he had seen. *Thrasybulus* took the hint that he was to cut off the principal men in the state. Such stories are witty, but there is nothing in them of the ludicrous.

Many of the sayings in the Confucian "Analects," paradigms, maxims, aphorisms by philosophers, poets, and wise men, such as Heraclitus, Antisthenes, Montaigne, Pascal, Schopenhauer, or the Bible, are witty, but they cannot be regarded as a matter of ridicule. A series of illustrations will help us most in the differentiation of wit and ridicule. We may take at random a few of the witty Biblical proverbs and sayings:

As vinegar to the teeth and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that sends him.

As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.

Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.

The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.

Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.

Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth and a foot out of joint.

As in water face answereth face, so is the heart of man to man.

We may take as examples the witty and pithy sayings of Ecclesiastes:

A living dog is better than a dead lion.

All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.

Be not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself over-wise, why shouldst thou destroy thyself?

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The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to the man of understanding, nor yet favor to the man of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Confucius, the grave Chinese sage, likewise has his witty sayings:

I have not yet met with a man who loves Virtue as he loves Beauty.

Some one asked him, "What say you of (the remark) 'Requite enmity with kindness'?"

"How then," he answered, "would you requite kindness?—Requite enmity with straightforwardness (justice) and kindness with kindness."

We may take as illustrations a few Oriental proverbs, the wisdom of folklore:

A devil with experience is better than an angel without.
Speak little and you will hear much.

He who speaks the truth must have one foot in the stirrup.

Montaigne is full of wit:

The fear of the fall more fevers me than the fall itself.

I find that our greatest vices derive their first propensity from our most tender infancy, and that our principal education depends upon the nurse.

We are never present with, but always beyond ourselves.

Of what is the most subtle folly made, but of the most subtle wisdom?

From the rare and quick agitations of our souls proceed the most wonderful and wildest frenzies; 'tis but a half turn of the toe from the one to the other.

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Similarly Pascal:

Man is the feeblest reed in existence, but he is a thinking reed.

It is the contest and not the victory that gives us pleasure.

It is easier to suffer death without thinking of it than to think of it when in no danger of suffering it.

A horse does not trouble itself about the admiration of its fellow.

The last thing we can settle in the composition of a thing is how to begin it.

We may cull a few witty sayings made by the genius of Shakespeare:

Fear and scruple shake us.

All things that are, are with more spirit chased than enjoyed.

A golden mind stoops not to shows of dross.

The world is still deceived with ornament. Ornament is but the gilded shore to a more dangerous sea.

My blood speaks to you in my veins.

When fortune means to men most good, she looks upon them with a threatening eye.

O, that my tongue were in the thunder's mouth! Then with a passion would I shake the world!

He that stands upon a slippery place makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up.

Jealousy is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on.

We may also take a few of the witty sayings of the ancient Greek philosophers and sages:

That judges of important affairs should hold office for life is not a good thing, for the mind grows old as well as the body.—Aristotle.

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Poverty is the parent of revolution and crime.—Aristotle.

Man's character is his fate.—Heraclitus.

Bear all thou canst; for Can dwells nigh to Must.—Pythagoras.

One to me is as good as ten thousand, if he be the best.—Heraclitus.

Strength of body is nobility in beasts, strength of character is nobility in men.—Democritus.

My enemy is not the man who wrongs me, but the man who *means* to wrong me.—Democritus.

Truth is in the depth.—Democritus.

One should attend to one's enemies, for they are the first persons to detect one's errors.—Antisthenes.

We may give a few witty sayings of American sages:

He who has a thousand friends has not a friend to spare,
And he who has one enemy will meet him everywhere.—
Emerson.

Man lives by pulses.

We thrive by casualties.

The poets are liberating the gods.

The quality of the imagination is to flow, and not to freeze.

Divinity is behind our failures and follies also.

A man is like a bit of Labrador spar, which has no luster as you turn it in your hand, until you come to a particular angle; then it shows deep and beautiful colors.

Temperament is the iron wire on which the beads are strung.—Emerson.

We may also refer to Franklin's "Poor Richard's Almanac":

The cat in gloves catches no mice.

Little strokes fell great oaks.

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We may conclude with a few verses from the "Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam," whose poetry is full of beauty, grandeur, and wit:

Into this Universe, and *Why* not knowing,
Nor *Whence*, like Water willy-nilly flowing;
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not *Whither*, willy-nilly blowing.

There was the Door to which I found no Key;
There was the Veil through which I might not see:
Some little talk awhile of ME and THEE
There was—and then no more of THEE and ME.

What! out of senseless Nothing to provoke
A conscious Something to resent the yoke
Of unpermitted Pleasure, under pain
Of Everlasting Penalties, if broke!

What! from his helpless Creature be repaid
Pure Gold for what he lent us, dross-allay'd—
Sue for a Debt he never did contract,
And cannot answer—Oh the sorry trade!

Oh Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make
And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake;
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd—Man's Forgiveness give—and take!

A Moment's Halt—a momentary taste
Of Being from the Well amid the Waste—
And Lo!—the phantom Caravan has reach'd
The Nothing it set out from—Oh, make haste!

A study of all the examples chosen from many writers, poets, and sages of various countries and different

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ages goes to show that wit is the opening of new horizons before the mental eye by means of the usual and the habitual associated with the unusual and the unhabitual; and again by *dissociation* of elements and traits of the customary from their habitual surroundings and *reassociation* with the strange, the unusual, and uncus-tomary. Along with it there must be present an awak-ening of reserve energies, both in him who makes the witty remark and in him who hears it and appreciates it. When the association belongs to the class of superior and inferior, then does the ludicrous arise. Wit may deal with relations of inferiority, but the emphasis is not necessarily on inferiority as it is in all the forms of ridi-cule. Wit is that form of thought and its expression which gives rise to free, spontaneous mental activity due to the arousal of subconscious reserve energy.

We may add that the popular, now vulgarized, say-ing that "brevity is the soul of wit" is but a superficial, glittering generality not based on the real nature of wit. Brevity in itself may be silly and stupid. It is only when the customary, the usual, the habitual relations of life become transcended by a sudden manifestation and play of reserve energy, it is only then that true wit comes into being. Wit is the result of union of widely differ-ent and contrasting ideas. Wit is the outcome of the clash of colliding, remote, customary concepts. As the heat, light, and life of new worlds are born out of col-lisions of cold, lifeless masses gravitating in space, so is wit.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SLUGGISH AND THE LUDICROUS

From our standpoint we can realize why the awkward, clumsy, the mechanical, the automatic are ludicrous. It is because awkward and clumsy motor reactions are indications of the mind behind them and indicate a sluggish intellect. Now a sluggish mind is essentially regarded as a stupid mind, a mind falling below the normal intellect, and is on that account an object of ridicule, of jokes, and of the comic. It is not economy of motor reactions, nor is it economy and thriftiness that are involved here. On the contrary, *it is the reckless expenditure, but without effort on the part of the person.* We can spend all we want and there is more energy left. The person who spends his energy, physical and mental, with effort gives the impression of one who lacks energy and needs economy. When no disagreeable consequences are associated with such an impression the effect is invariably ludicrous.

The prodigal is rarely laughed at, it is the close, the stingy, the miserly that form the butt of ridicule. As Schopenhauer strongly puts it: "Avarice is the quintessence of all vices . . . This utterly incorrigible sin, this refined and sublimated desire of the flesh, is the abstract form in which all lusts are concentrated, and to which it stands like a general idea to individual particulars. Accordingly, avarice is the vice of age, just as

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extravagance is the vice of youth. Laughter never comes from economy, but from superabundance of energy. *Laughter is by no means due to an economizing process, it is essentially a dissipation of energy. The ludicrous, the comic is the trigger that opens in the audience stores of accumulated reserve energy.*

We may then say that suggestiveness, indirect suggestion in regard to inferiority in general and mental inferiority in particular, forms the mainspring, the chief source of the ludicrous and of the comic. In the last analysis, however, we may say that *we ridicule stupidity in all its forms.*

Sluggishness of mind, stupidity, especially *human* stupidity, under all its forms and disguises is the sole source of the ludicrous. All disguises are ludicrous, not so much because they are disguises, but because under them we discern the silly, the stupid, and the self-contented, arrogant, foolish ignorance. We laugh at the judge, at the lawyer, at the professor, at the physician, at the official who hide their ignorance and stupidity under the cloak of solemn ceremonies and obsolete meaningless mummeries. All ceremonies, all stereotyped, solemn actions are ridiculous, when behind them we discern the meaningless, the stupid, and the ignorant.

It is not the automatic, nor the "mechanical encrusted upon the living," as Bergson would have it, that brings about the ridiculous, but it is always stupidity revealed to the eye of intelligence. The very examples brought by Bergson show, not mechanism, but stupidity of the persons at whom the ridicule is directed.

An M. P. questions the Home Secretary on the morrow of a terrible murder which took place in a railroad carriage: "The assassin, after dispatching his victim,

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must have got out the wrong side of the train, thereby infringing the company's rules." There is nothing mechanical about it except the fact that the remark shows the stupidity of the M. P. In the same way Doctor Bahis' maxim, "It is better to die through following the rules than to recover through violating them," is not an indication of the mechanical, but an example of stupidity, of lack of understanding of the actual purpose of medicine. This may be duplicated by the following anecdote:

Irish doctor: Well, I've knocked the fayver out of him anyhow.

Wife: O Doctor, do you think there is any hope?

Doctor: Small chance, I'm afeard, madam; but you'll have the satisfaction of knowing he died cured.

The stupid and therefore ludicrous side of the situation is brought out in the physician's last phrase that the patient died cured. This stupidity of misconceiving the end of cure, which should lead to life instead of death, is often directed against the surgeon who reports a successful operation and death of the patient. The stupidity ridiculed is against the professional narrow-mindedness which concentrates its attention on the knocking out of the "fayver," on the successful operation from a purely professional standpoint, without regard to the patient himself, for whose life and welfare the treatment and operation were undertaken. This sort of stupidity is common with professional men who think more of their profession than of the welfare of their patients and clients for whom the profession ultimately exists.

This stupid narrow-mindedness into which professional men are apt to drift forms the constant butt of ridicule. Bergson is right in his remark, though he gives

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it the wrong interpretation: "Bridgson's words are significant: 'F-form, mind you, f-form.' A man laughs at a judge in a morning coat, and yet he would quake with dread at the mere sight of an attorney in his gown. 'F-form, all a matter of f-form.'" This is perfectly true. It is the function of ridicule to pierce the thick crust of professional bigotry. Pascal puts it quite forcibly:

"The greatest and most important thing in the world is founded on weakness; and the foundation is admirably firm; for nothing can be more certain than that the people will be feeble.

"Our magistrates are adepts in this mystery. Their halls of justice, their robes of scarlet and ermine, with the other insignia of their office, are all necessary."

It is the function of ridicule to rend the cloak of form and ceremony, and show the hidden emptiness, weakness, and stupidity. It is the function of ridicule to tear away the mantle that hides senseless form, hollow hypocrisy, and imbecility. We laugh at stupidity under all its forms and disguises. In fact, we may say that *all ridicule, even where it concerns physical defects and motor clumsiness and awkwardness, is aimed at mental deficiency and intellectual turpitude. Stupidity is the target of the shafts of ridicule.*

CHAPTER XXII

RIDDLE, DISSOCIATION, AND SURPRISE

Laughter is the result of tapping new sources of sub-conscious reserve energy; the element of suddenness, or of surprise must be taken into consideration. The turn in the joke or in the ludicrous must come in a sudden sharp way, thus heightening the contrast effects and setting the hidden energies into activity by liberating the unused, accumulated surplus energy. When the same joke is repeated a few times it becomes stale. When the result of the comic becomes known beforehand the laughter is deadened. Surprise at the unexpected, when of a pleasant character, is generally provocative of a smile or of laughter, but when connected with the elements of inferiority and stupidity of the object or of the given situation the laughable effect is irresistible.

The audience must have the feeling of expectancy and of surprise at the outcome. The outcome must not be too obvious. A veil must be skillfully thrown over the last results. The inference must be left to the listener or to the looker-on. As Aristotle would put it, the joke and the comic must be of the nature of an enthymeme, the conclusion should be omitted. A veil of a gauzy, transparent character must be thrown over the outcome. The conclusion must not be seen, and still it must be sufficiently indicated indirectly so that the audience should be sure to supply it from its own mental resources.

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This artistic illusion of suggestiveness, of indirect suggestibility, is one that specially delights the audience. In the joke, as in the comedy, the audience is apparently made to participate in the act. The audience is thrown skillfully on its own inner resources and is artfully made to supply the missing links. Such a skillful maneuver, when successfully carried out, sets the audience in an uproar of uncontrollable laughter.

The joke and the comic are constructed like a riddle, but unlike the usual riddle or charade the solution must be given in the puzzle. The answer must be given in the very substance of the joke or of the comic. In the riddle and in the conundrum the solution is hidden, and the more hidden the solution is, the better the riddle is appreciated. Not so is it in the joke and the comic—the solution is hidden and still is fully apparent or transparent to the audience. The riddle needs an explanation, and the harder it is to find the explanation, the more difficult the solution is, the better is the riddle. Quite opposite is the case with the joke and the comic. Nothing kills a joke so much as an explanation. The joke and the comic resemble the riddle in the fact that the conclusion or the solution is not given, but while in the riddle all efforts are made to hide the solution, in the joke and the comic the solution lies on the surface; the hiding is only a matter of playful semblance.

In the different forms of the ludicrous, in the joke and in the comic, the riddle is such that one has to find out at a glance where the defect, the subnormal, the stupid lies. Now the stupid may be in act, in behavior, in manners, in costume, or it may be in a higher sphere, namely, in the moral and in the intellectual—it may be a lapse or permanent defect of moral or of reasoning

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capacities. In the ultimate analysis all these different varieties can be referred to sheer stupidity.

When a man runs and slips we may laugh when the person is young. What is expected of him is agility, motor control which indicates an active mind. The slipping of a young person is an indication of a sluggish mind. Should the person suffer from motor disturbances or be old there would be compassion and not laughter. A young person playing croquet, for instance, and taking his aim and missing is laughed at, because it is an indication of his psychomotor sluggishness. Similarly I once observed great hilarity in onlookers at a person who was sitting on a stout branch and sawing it in front of him, and then coming down, branch and all. The laughter was clearly on account of the person's stupidity.

When again a man walks in a solemn way, slips, falling into mud, showing signs of ill temper, the tendency to laughter is enhanced in the bystanders. The person reveals by his anger his silliness, which is laughed at. A marionette acting like an intelligent person is laughed at because of the absence of reason which we find in it. Thus Collodi in his "Pinocchio" describes "the people in the street, seeing the wooden marionette running as fast as a rabbit, stopped to look at it, and laughed, and laughed." They laughed at the marionette and at the awkwardness of the men chasing a wooden, senseless marionette. A person acting like a thing or like a machine is laughed at. For mechanical action, automatism, indicates lack of reasoning, deficiency of intellect—stupidity.

A person tossed about like a ball, as *Sancho Panza*, is ludicrous, because he becomes assimilated to a wooden

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object or to a rubber ball; in other words, the image of the *blockhead* hovers before our mind and we regard the man as a fool. Similarly clowns behaving stiffly like wooden sticks and treating their heads like wooden balls are ludicrous, because they clearly, though indirectly, tell the audience by their actions: we are marionettes, we are blockheads. All awkward, clumsy, motor adjustments are ludicrous, because they indicate to people who judge of the mind by the motor reactions that the intelligence is dull, torpid, and inactive.

Even in the case of moral defects we do not laugh at the clever rogue, but at the knave and the scoundrel who, through stupidity, disclose their dishonesty and knavery. We do not laugh at the crimes and sins of guilty persons, but we laugh at their silliness and stupidity. In the same way worn-out ceremonies, customs, manners, rites, and beliefs are ridiculed, because there is no sense behind them, because they are stupid. It is not moral depravity that is laughed at, but it is torpid, mental inactivity, stupidity. *Crime and sin are punished by law and religion, but stupidity is chastened by laughter.*

We must, however, remind the reader of the importance of the surprise element. The foolishness pointed out should not be of a character to which we are accustomed, which we know and with which we are familiar in the ordinary intercourse of life. The novelty of the silly aspect is an important element in the ludicrous. What we are accustomed to no longer arouses our energies, it falls below the threshold of stimulation. A joke by repetition becomes stale. *Repetition is fatal to the comic. Ever new displays, ever new insights into*

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man's stupidity and into the depths of human folly are the requirements of the ludicrous.

It is the first solution of the puzzle that pleases, there is no second solution. In the same way with the ludicrous it is the first realization of the joke and of the comic that electrifies us, the second one leaves us indifferent, and the third or more makes us turn up our nose. We positively dislike a joke that is often repeated, it is an indication of poverty of thought, of stupidity, and as such is apt to excite in us a derisive smile at the person who tells it.

The novel aspect of human folly is a requisite of laughter. We do not laugh at what is usual and customary, even if at first we may regard it as silly and foolish. *Custom is the tyrant of men and holds them in bonds stronger than steel.* Gradually the ludicrous side dwindles away as we get used and accustomed to the stupidity and take it as part and parcel of life. On the one hand, the customary, as it becomes interwoven with our spirit, becomes by it rationalized, and, on the other hand, the unusual, the strange, the unc customary, even if good and rational, appears to us as irrational and therefore seems to us ludicrous. A good example is the Asiatic coming into European society. We may also quote Herodotus in the strong contrasts he makes between Egyptian and Hellenic customs, contrasts which must have greatly amused the Greek world. It requires the whole force of genius to discover stupidity in hal lowed custom, or to see the rational in the unusual.

In his essays Montaigne expresses tersely the great power of custom:

He seems to have had a right and true apprehension of the power of custom, who first invented the story of

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a country woman who, having accustomed herself to play with and carry a young calf in her arms, and daily continuing to do so as it grew up, obtained this by custom, that, when grown to be a great ox, she was still able to bear it. For, in truth, custom is a violent and treacherous school mistress. She, by little and little, slyly and unperceived, slips in the foot of her authority, but having by this gentle and humble beginning, with the benefit of time, fixed and established it, she then unmasks a furious and tyrannic countenance, against which we have no more the courage or the power so much as to lift up our eyes. . . . I do believe that no so absurd or ridiculous fancy can enter into human imagination, that does not meet with some example of public practice, and that, consequently, our reason does not ground and back up.

The factor, or, rather to say, the process which is quite frequently taking place in the bringing about of the ludicrous is that of *dissociation*. The object, the precept, the idea, the situation must be dissociated from its customary associations and then brought again into association with concepts, ideas, images, and situations of an inferior character, physical, mental, and moral. A word, or phrase, is detached from its usual meaning and a different meaning of an inferior character is given to it. The meaning of inferiority is not directly given, but only implied, being strongly suggested to the listener. This, for instance, may be exemplified in the remark made on an actor: "Jokes aside, he is a fair actor." Now the meaning of fair means nice and good, but it also means a market place. In other words, the critic, while apparently saying that the acting is fair, good, and beautiful, really implies or suggests the idea that the acting is fit for a fair, for a market place.

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The adjective fair, which is indicative of excellence, is made use of as a noun and thus conveys the idea that the acting is poor and that the actor is but a clown. The word fair is dissociated from its meaning as good and excellent and is associated with the clown of the market place.

Take again the following example:

Unfortunate lady, how sad is your lot!
Your ringlets are red, your poems are not.

Here the play is on the word red, the lady's hair is *red* and her poems are not *read*, they are not good. The looks of the lady and her poems are both brought into a relation of inferiority.

When Horner Tooke was asked by George III. whether he ever played cards, he replied, "I cannot, your Majesty, tell a king from a knave."

The relation of the king and knave of cards is dissociated from the play of cards and brought into relation with the real king and the knave. It is like saying in so many words that there is no difference between a king and a knave.

To take another example:

At a banquet the host presented his wines to the guests by the little speech: "I am not a connoisseur, but I have some wines fit for the gods."

An Irishman present took the hint. When he gave a banquet he made the following introduction: "I am not O'Connor, but I have some whiskey fit for Christ!"

Here the structure of the joke is brought out even more clearly, inasmuch as the meaning is changed through a misconception of words due to ignorance and

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to similarity of associations in the Irishman's mind. It is a play on resemblance of words *connoisseur* and *O'Connor*, as well as a play of association expressed in similar concepts such as *wine* and *whiskey*, *the gods* and *Christ*. The joke clearly shows an interchange of the inferior for the superior and suggests the ignorance and stupidity of the Irishman.

Some remarks of Coleridge, rather of a democratic character, were greeted with hisses, at which he exclaimed: "I am not at all surprised that, when the red hot prejudices of aristocrats are suddenly plunged into the cool element of reason, they should go off with a hiss."

Here the play on similar words is accompanied by a similarity of associations which reveals the irrationality and stupidity of his opponents.

"I hope I did not weary you by the length of my sermon, Doctor," said a young preacher at dinner.

"No, nor by its breadth either."

The play here is on the word length, which is used originally in regard to time; while the interlocutor utilizes the word in a different sense he employs the associated word of breadth, but with reference to thought. In other words, he tells the preacher that the sermon lacked in thought, thus indirectly telling him that the sermon was dull and stupid.

The misapprehension of a word showing the ignorance and stupidity of the man who used it is itself often a source of laughter.

"There are some spectacles," exclaimed an orator, "that a person never forgets."

"I'd like to know whar dey sells them," remarked an old colored man.

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There is one point we must always have in mind, and that is that the *climax* or sting of the joke or of the comic, though wrapped and covered up by a sugared capsule, should invariably carry the suggestion of defect, of shortcomings, of moral and mental inferiority, of dullness and stupidity. Perhaps a series of examples will best help a clear understanding of the matter:

Clergyman: I've lost my portmanteau.

Traveler: I pity your grief!

Clergyman: All my sermons are in it.

Traveler: I pity the thief!

"I cannot understand," says Dick,

"What it is that makes my legs so thick;"

"You do not understand," says Harry,

"How great a calf they have to carry."

In the first one the implication is that the sermons are poor and pitiful, and in the second one the ridicule lies in telling Dick that he is a big calf and stupid. Both of them have their climax.

"So you refuse to buy my car, do you?"

"I certainly do. When I want a car like yours, I'll go to the five and ten cent store and get a new one."

We may complete the thought left suggested and reveal the sting of the reply. A car like the one you wish to palm off on me is cheap and worthless even as a new one. You are silly if you think me such a fool as to buy your car.

"If you were my husband, I would give you poison."

"Madam, if I were your husband, I would take it."

The woman tells the man that he is so bad that he deserves to be poisoned, while the man retorts that

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under such conditions he would willingly take poison, as his life would be so miserable that death is preferable, because she is such a mean shrew. While she tells him that he deserves death, he replies indirectly that she is worse than death. And now mark another point. The woman in disparaging him makes the slip in regarding the man as a possible husband. This stupid, contradictory slip is taken occasion of, and the woman is made the butt of ridicule. At the same time it may be well to notice here the effect of the principle of dissociation often present in the comic. The original thought, the death of a man, is dissociated and put in the light as death of her husband. This dissociation frees the man from the stigma of being a bad man and puts the woman in a ludicrous light as being both a bad woman, a bad wife, and brings out her stupidity in making the slip by the suggestion that he could possibly be her husband.

Two men who had not seen one another for a great while meeting by chance, one asked the other how he did. He replied he was very well and had been married since he saw him.

"That's good news, indeed," said he.

"Nay, not such good news, neither," replies the other, "for I married a shrew."

"That was bad," said the friend.

"Not so bad, neither; for I had two thousand pounds with her."

"That's well again," said the other.

"Not so well, neither," said the man, "for I laid it out in sheep, and they all died of the rot."

"That was hard, indeed," said his friend.

"Not so hard," said the husband, "for I sold the skins for more than the sheep cost."

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"That made you amends," said the other.

"Not so much amends, neither, for I laid out my money in a house, and it was burnt to the ground."

"That was a great loss, indeed," said the friend.

"Not so great a loss, neither; for my wife was burnt in it."

We have here present the baffling sense of surprise so important in wit and the comic, while the story winds up with a climax full of surprise. The whole force of the ridicule is sustained and leads up to the evil in women and the misery of married life.

Take the passage from Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield":

Olivia undertook to be our prolocutor, and delivered the whole in a summary way, only saying, "We were thrown from our horses." At which account the ladies were greatly concerned; but being told the family received no hurt, they were exceedingly glad, extremely glad; but being informed that we were almost killed by fright, they were vastly sorry; but hearing that we had a very good night, they were extremely glad.

"Were yez iver shtruck be loightning, Pat?"

"Oi don't remimber."

"Don't remimber?"

"No. A mon that's bin married tin years don't remimber sich troifles as thot."

Foreman (at the door): Did yer husband hov a new suit av clo'es on this mor'nin', Mrs. O'Malley?

Mrs. O'Malley: He did.

Foreman: They're ruined entirely.

Mrs. O'Malley: How did ut happen?

Foreman: He was blown up be a charge of dinnymite.

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Once an Irish advocate was examining a witness, and, failing to get a correct answer, said: "There is no use in asking you questions, for I see the villain in your face."

"Did you, sir?" said the man; "faix, I never knew before that my face was a looking-glass."

Pat: What be yer charge for a funeral notice in yer paper?

Editor: Five dollars an inch.

Pat: Good heavens! An' me poor brother was six feet high.

Pat was in the museum looking at a copy of the "Winged Victory."

"And phat may yez call thot?" he asked an attendant.

"That is a statue of Victory, sir," was the answer.

Pat surveyed the headless and armless statue with renewed interest.

"Vichtry, is it?" he said. "Then begorry, Oi'd loike to see the other fellow."

The following remarks by Lichtenberg disclose the suggestive nature of relations of inferiority characteristic of ridicule: "When a head and a book come into collision, and one sounds hollow, is it always the book?" We take another example from the same author, an example which even more clearly expresses the relation of inferiority inherent in ridicule: "Works like this are as a mirror; if an ass looks in, you cannot expect an apostle to look out."

Sa'di, in "The Gulistan," expresses the same idea more directly when he says: "I grew weary of instructing brutes, and of holding up a mirror to an assembly of the blind."

A close inspection of all such jokes clearly reveals the fact that the laughter is at some moral, mental, or

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logical inferiority disclosed unexpectedly to the view of the reader or listener. At the same time we observe the process of dissociation and the element of climax.

The following verses from Goldsmith illustrate the climax in the comic:

Good people all, with one accord,
Lament for Madam Blaize,
Who never wanted a good word—
From those who spoke her praise.

The needy seldom passed her door,
And always found her kind;
She freely lent to all the poor—
Who left a pledge behind.

She strove the neighborhood to please
With manners wondrous winning;
And never follow'd wicked ways—
Unless when she was sinning.

At church, in silks and satins new,
With hoop of monstrous size,
She never slumber'd in her pew—
But when she shut her eyes.

Her love was sought, I do aver,
By twenty beaux and more;
The King himself has follow'd her—
When she has walk'd before.

But now her wealth and finery fled,
Her hangers-on cut short all;
The doctors found, when she was dead—
Her last disorder mortal.

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Let us lament, in sorrow sore,
For Kent Street well may say,
That had she lived a twelvemonth more—
She had not died to-day.

Mental and moral inferiority are well brought out in
each climax.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GROUNDWORK OF THE COMIC

The most general way in which the comic effect is brought about is what may better be termed as the *process of deviation*. *"A deviation from the original meaning with a suggestion to the inferior is invariably one of the great sources of the ludicrous."* A deviation from the normal to the subnormal, from the moral to the immoral, from the intelligent to the unintelligent, from the wise to the stupid, from the superior or normal to the inferior is the great source of all comic and ludicrous.¹ Any change or variation in the phrase, in the emphasis, accent, or in the order of the words tending to a different and disadvantageous meaning to the speaker excites laughter. Any variation or deviation in the relation, or in the order of events, or in the environment in which the set of events is given with a tendency toward a suggestion of the inferior is invariably regarded as comic.

Associations of contrast are frequently utilized for ludicrous effects. The great is contrasted with the small, the grave with the gay, the good with the bad, the wise with the foolish, the superior with the inferior. The ludicrous is formed by the blending of contrasting shades and colors in the physical, moral, and intellectual world—the one passing and melting into the other, always with the suggestion toward the lower

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side of life, always with the hidden grin and leer in the direction of what is mean, low, wicked, silly, and stupid.

The shock given by the contrast and the suggestive glimpse into the world of the great combine to awaken the sense of the ludicrous. The grandiose, the pompous, the sublime, ending in the low, in the mean, in the stupid, result in the jocose and the comic. Instance the verse:

The thunder roared, the clouds grew big,
The lightning flashed—and struck a pig.

This transition from the pompous to the despicable, from the grand to the vile and the mean, has the effect of the ludicrous.

Take an example from Byron:

They mourned for those who perished in the cutter,
And also for the biscuits, cakes and butter.

His Majesty was confined to his house with a violent cold. The printer made an error, and the phrase was changed to: His Majesty was confined to his house with a "violent scold."

The general behaved like a *hero* was changed to behaved like a *hare*.

In one paper an announcement read that a *surgeon* caught in the river was sold at ten cents a pound.

A clergyman's work was complimented as *immortal* in which the printer omitted the "t" to the great consternation of both the editor and the divine.

An orator told an impatient audience: "Wait, gentlemen, I have a few more pearls."

Every one who has been in the Civil War is a colonel. Is it because they had shells?

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This is not much of a joke, as it turns on pronunciation *Colonel* as *kernel*. Still people laughed when they heard it. The amusement lies in the indirect association of the dignified heroes with *nuts*.

Let us take the Biblical text with a printer's mistake as a climax.

And he rebuked the winds and the sea, and lo, there was a *Clam!*

The unintentional slip made by the Bible itself in the fable told by Jotham to the men of Shechem is quite amusing on account of the startling assertion as to the divine power of the juice of the vine:

Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, *and* reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which *cheereth* God and man? . . .

In the following examples we find the factors of dissociation, sudden unexpected turn, surprise of contrast—two or more contradictory thoughts or mutually exclusive trains of ideas run together with consequent incongruity and nonsense in the climax.

A lady one day heard a knock at the door, and afterwards asked the servant who had called.

"It was a gentleman, ma'am, looking for the wrong house," replied Mary.

In stating his grievance to his employer, Dan D—, famed for his sagacity and his persuasive powers, said, "If you please, sir, I've been sent as a delegate by the workers to ask a favor of you regarding the payment of our wages."

"Yes, and what do they desire?" queried the master.

"Well, sir, it is the desire of myself, and it is also the

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desire of every man in the establishment, that we receive our fortnight's pay every week."

"Courting," said an Irishman, "is like dying; sure a man must do it for himself."

"It is a great pleasure entirely to be alone, especially when your sweetheart is wid ye," observed one reflective swain.

A man obtained permission from his employer to attend a wedding. He turned up next day with his arm in a sling and a black eye.

"Hello, what is the matter?" asked his employer.

"Well, you see," said the wedding guest, "we were very merry yesterday, and I saw a fellow strutting about with a swallow-tailed coat and a white waistcoat. 'And who might you be?' sez I. 'I'm the best man,' sez he, and begorra he was, too."

A daughter of Erin was soliciting custom for milk from passengers on board a liner which had just arrived at Queenstown from Canada.

"And what sort of milk might it be?" asked a passenger familiarly.

"Skim milk, to be sure," said the girl.

"Skim milk! Why, we give that to the pigs in my country."

"Indade!" replied the milkmaid simply, "but we sell it to them here."

An Irishman was visiting the Falls of Niagara. "There," cried Jonathan to Paddy, as he waved his hand in the direction of the Horseshoe Fall, "there now, is not that wonderful?"

"Wonderful?" replied Paddy. "What's wonder'ul?"

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"Why, to see all that water come thundering over them rocks?"

"Faix, then, to tell ye the honest truth," was the response, "I can't see anything very wonderful in that. Why, what the divil is to hinthier it from coming over? If it stopped on the top that'd be something wonderful."

"Why were you late in barracks last night, Private Atkins?" demanded an officer.

"Train from London was very late, sir," was the reply.

"Very good," said the officer. "Next toime the train's late take care you come on an earlier one."

An Irishman named Linahan, after short residence, made application to be naturalized. One of the questions which is asked of applicants for citizenship is, "Have you read the constitution of the United States?" When this question was asked of Linahan, he replied, "No, your Honor, I have not, but me friend, Dennis M'Carthy, read it to me, and it's mighty well pleased I was with it." He got his papers.

The play of the joke turns on "reading." It is not mere reading, it is understanding that is of importance. The allusion to foolishness lies far in the background.

"So yez t'ink Friday is an unlucky day?" asked Doolan.

"Oi know it," replied Hooligan. "Oi lost me purse wid tin shillins in it on a Friday. Don't yez call thot bad luck?"

"Yis; bad luck fer you, but foine luck for the fellow that found it."

A show proprietor said to Pat, who was looking at a cinematograph, "How do you like the fight?"

"Oi've only one objection, sor," said Pat.

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"What is it," asked the proprietor.

"Just that Oi can't get in it," was the answer.

"An' how did ye enjoy St. Patrick's day?" queried Muldoon of his friend.

"Foine," was the answer. "We cracked Casey's skull in the marnin', an' attinded his wake in the avenin'."

"I intend to pray that you may forgive Casey for having thrown that brick at you," said a parson when he called to see a man who had been worsted in a *mêlée*.

"Mabbe yer riv'rence 'ud be savin' toime if ye'd just wait till Oi git well, an' pray for Casey," replied the patient.

The last few examples well illustrate the pugnacious character of the Irishman.

Incongruity and absurdity disclosing silliness, stupidity, and general mental inferiority are important factors in the comic, bringing out the comic, the ludicrous. A few examples will illustrate this point:

Papa to Johnny: You had a fight again. Your forehead is bleeding.

Johnny: I bit myself in the forehead.

Papa: How could you do that? You could not reach your forehead.

Johnny: I climbed up on a chair.

We laugh here at the absurdity which lies in the association of incongruity of cause and effect. We laugh at the false analogy of reaching a high object such as the forehead by climbing on a chair or on a ladder.

The same may be exemplified by the Irish railroad porter.

"The ten o'clock train 'll go at eleven o'clock to-night, and there'll be no last train."

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Another example is that of the man who said:

"I receive an immense number of anonymous letters which are quite insulting. I despise them too much to pay any attention to them. When I write anonymous letters, I always sign them."

The joke lies in the incongruity of signing anonymous letters as well as in the acknowledgment indirectly made that he writes insulting letters.

Again we may take the story of the captain who instructed his corporals:

I want all the corporals to give the word of command together. "Shoulder arms!" he shouted. He then angrily exclaimed: "I hear several corporals saying nothing at all."

This may be matched by the Irishman who, at a meeting, called out:

"All ye who are present say: yea! All those who are absent say: nay!"

The ludicrous side of the joke lies in the incongruity and absurdity of hearing what is not said, or of expecting absent people to indicate their absence by answering "nay" to your question. At the same time the ridicule is directed against the person who naïvely makes such remarks—it suggests his stupidity.

A foolish young esquire, hearing his steward say he had killed a bullock for Christmas, exclaimed: "What do you mean by such extravagance and expense? Have but one half killed at a time!"

Thus a person's physiognomy has been jestingly described as: "a few pensive lines about the nose showed that snuff and sorrow had been busy there." Contrast of associations, incongruity of images, clash of incon-

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sistent ideas, contradictory statements, interplay of discordant actions, and sentiments which reveal their inner incompatibility, as well as views that cannot be reconciled, because of their being illogical and absurd, all arouse laughter. In short, any association which expresses moral and mental turpitude compared with the normal and ideal standard of the given society and age gives rise to smiles, ridicule, and laughter. In all the cases of the comic and the ludicrous we find the combination of logical and illogical, moral and immoral, the brilliant and the commonplace, the ideal and the matter of fact, the superior and the inferior, the intelligent and the stupid, all conjoined and combined into an explosive that at the least concussion gives rise to an outburst of laughter.

The following anecdote may be taken as an example:

A descendant of the noble Harmodius was taunting Iphicrates with his low birth.

"The difference between us is this," Iphicrates replied, "my family begins with me, and your's ends with you."

The contrasting relations of high and low, of good and evil, of great and small are here clearly brought out. The exalted are humbled and the humble are exalted. We laugh, we are amused, when we realize real merit clashing with deceit. The sham discerned under the garb of nobility and superiority is invariably an object of ridicule. The contrast of the two discordant and incongruous concepts, the noble and the ignoble, the superior and the inferior, their association, dissociation, and final resolution with the surprise element in which the ignoble is shown to be clothed in the garb of the noble, like the donkey in the lion's skin, arouses the sense of the ludicrous.

CHAPTER XXIV

MIMICRY

Why is mimicking a person or an animal ludicrous? Because the imitation is of something which is regarded as inferior. We do not laugh at the perfect imitation of a beautiful song, nor do we ridicule the perfect imitation of a human figure whether sculptured or painted, but we laugh at defects, at the representation of awkwardness, of clumsiness, and silliness. In mimicry it is not simply the imitation of any kind of gestures, or of action, or of mannerisms, or of speech, that is regarded as ludicrous, but it is only certain definite manifestations, only certain motor activities or postures that excite laughter. The imitation in mimicry excites our laughter because the gestures, postures, speech, and phrases imitated are considered as silly, senseless, stupid. The mimicry or imitation of what is regarded as good, true, and beautiful excites in us the highest admiration. When we mimic persons and their modes of behavior it is to bring out in the language of gestures the moral and mental inferiority, the inner senselessness of the person.

In grotesque postures and figures we find the presence of abnormalities, of conditions and states of inferiority, deformities, and defects of body and mind.

An excellent description of the power of the ludicrous possessed by grimace-making and caricature may be found in "Notre Dame de Paris," by Victor Hugo :

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The field was clear for every sort of folly. . . . The pulling of faces began. The first to appear in the opening—eyelids turned inside out, the gaping mouth of a ravening beast, the brow creased and wrinkled—was greeted with such a roar of inextinguishable laughter—that Homer would have taken all these ragamuffins for gods.

A second and third distortion followed, to be succeeded by another and another; and with each one the laughter redoubled, and the crowd stamped and roared with delight. Picture to yourself a series of faces representing successively every geometrical form, from the triangle to the trapezium, from the cone to the polyhedron; every human expression, from rage to lewdness; every stage of life, from the creases of the newly born to the wrinkles of hoary age; every phantasm of mythology and religion, from Faunus to Beelzebub; every animal head, from the buffalo to the eagle, from the shark to the bulldog. . . . The great Hall was one vast furnace of effrontery and unbridled mirth, in which every mouth was a yell, every countenance a grimace, every individual a posture. The whole mass shrieked and bellowed. Every new visage that came grinning and gnashing to the window was fresh fuel to the furnace. And from this seething multitude, like steam from a cauldron, there rose a hum—shrill, piercing, sibilant, as from a vast swarm of gnats. . . .

Suddenly there came a thunder of applause mingled with shouts of acclamation. The Fools had elected their Pope.

In truth, the grimace that beamed through the broken window at this moment was nothing short of the miraculous. After all the faces—pentagonal, hexagonal, and heteroclite—which had succeeded each other in the stone frame, without realizing the grotesque ideal set up by the inflamed popular imagination, nothing inferior to the supreme effort now dazzling the spectator would have sufficed to carry every vote. We can hardly convey to the reader

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a conception of that tetrahedral nose, that horse-shoe mouth, of that small left eye obscured by a red and bristling brow, while the right disappeared under a monstrous wart, of those uneven teeth, with breaches here and there, like the crenated walls of a fortress, of that horny lip over which one of the teeth projected like an elephant's tusk, of that cloven chin, nor, above all, of that expression overlying the whole, an indefinable mixture of malice, bewilderment, and sadness.

There was not a single dissentient voice. They rushed to the chapel and in triumph dragged forth the thrice lucky Pope of Fools. Then surprise and admiration reached the culminating point. He had but shown his natural countenance.

Rather let us say his whole person was a grimace. An enormous head covered with red bristles; between the shoulders a great hump balanced by one in front; a system of thighs and legs so curiously misplaced that they only touched at the knees, and viewed from the front, appeared like two sickles joined at the handles; huge splay feet, monstrous hands, and, with all this deformity, a nameless impression of formidable strength, agility, and courage. He looked like a giant broken and badly repaired.

The picture drawn by Victor Hugo of the *Pope of Fools* reminds one of the Homeric awkward figure of the Cyclop *Polyphemus* or of Shakespeare's monster *Caliban*. The image that comes to one's mind is that of a powerful orang-outang or gorilla, an ape-like man or a man-like ape. In fact, that is the way the audience regards the monster:

"Oh, the hideous ape!" exclaimed one.

"'Tis the devil himself!" added another.

"The other night he came and made faces at me through the window. I thought it not a man!"

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As we have pointed out before, physical deficiencies, whether natural or mimicked, are in the lower stages of civilization and culture objects of ridicule. The ridicule, however, is not so much directed against the physical defect itself as against the spiritual deficiency which the physical deformity expresses. The body mirrors the mind. We see a stunted mind in a deformed body.

We laugh at deformities which express defects of personality, faults of character, inferior aberrations, and deviations of the mind. The various expressions of a fool, the silly gestures, postures, mannerisms of action, and speech of an imbecile or of an idiot give rise to laughter. We laugh at people whose actions are thoughtless, whose manners are silly, whose speech is senseless, and whose gestures are inappropriate and meaningless.

In every person's life activity there are foolish breaks, moments in which intelligence lapses, when the person may become the object of comic imitation. The comedian, the joker, the wit, and the wag seize on such moments and, bringing them to light, expose them to the ridicule of other people. Vacant, silly expressions of the features of the face, stupid, meaningless gestures, irrational actions all go to form the subject matter of the comic and the ludicrous.

Motor reactions are the mirror of mental life. The deformities of physical expression are regarded as reflections of mental deficiencies. Deformities of bodily expression are regarded as indications of flaws of character and defects of mind. We read by the physical expressions the stupidities that lie behind them. In all comic imitation the imitated acts suggest mental inferiority of some kind. It is this *mental inferiority*, suggested by imitation of gestures and expressions, that is

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regarded as ludicrous. Moral and mental defects brought out by physical expressions of attitude, deportment, physiognomy are the factors of the ludicrous in all forms of imitation and mimicry of the comic.

The cartoonist in drawing his cartoons of individuals or situations is bringing to light mental and moral deficiencies which, by a form of suggestion, he exposes to the gaze of the public. By a play of the features of the face, by exaggeration or diminution of organs and traits of character the ludicrous side is exposed to view. The nose may be lengthened, the lips may be made thick or retreating, the teeth be formed like tusks, the ears may be made large, the forehead may be made retreating and possibly horns and hoofs added. All sorts of deformities may be brought into play in order that mental and moral traits may be exposed to ridicule. Sometimes a very slight change in the features of the face or in the figure may do the work, may bring about the ludicrous effect. The cartoon may be regarded as a joke, a jest, a travesty, a farce, or burlesque done in pictures.

We may look at the cartoon as an ideographic joke. Quite often the cartoon is supplemented, as we find in the comic papers, by the ordinary form of joke. The two often interpret and interpenetrate each other. The inscription made on the picture explains its meaning, which is further supplemented and developed by the usual joke. The picture illustrates the verbal joke, and the joke in its abstract and verbal form is strengthened by the cartoon or caricature. Visual and auditory images are blended to intensify the ludicrous side of the object or of the situation. As, for instance, the boy who made a picture of a wagon and under it wrote: "drawn by a horse."

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The pictures may be given in a series and may represent a whole dramatic performance of various individuals under different conditions and in various situations, bringing the whole to a climax, all the scenes having a running verbal commentary. We may say, then, that in all forms of comic mimicry, of comic imitation there must be present the strong undercurrent of suggestion of mental inferiority. The very object, the aim of mimicry, of imitation is the revelation of the inferiority of the butt of ridicule. The success of mimicry or of comic imitation consists in the happy selection of traits which are regarded as low, mean, and below the standard of ordinary intelligence and morality, characteristic of the given group, society, or age in which the joke, the cartoon, or caricature is made.

The cartoon does not ridicule physical being, but mind, character, spirit. In all forms of the comic it is not the body, but it is the soul that is the subject of ridicule. It is not the material, the physical side, the mechanical, the automatic functions of the body which are ridiculed, but it is always the virtues of the soul, when falling below the normal accepted standard, that form the everlasting butt of ridicule. The material, the physical is no matter for the joke, for the comic. It is the mental, the spiritual in all its infirmities, shortcomings, and failures that forms the everlasting material of the joke and the comic.

The infirmities of the spirit are as much chastened by laughter as they are purified by pain. It is laughter, ridicule that arouses the spirit out of its torpor, gives the slumbering soul a shock, stings the spirit into action and further development. When man or society falls into mental turpitude it is the whip of ridicule that lashes

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it into mental awakening and further work. Aristotle is right—the ridiculous deals with mental turpitude unattended with pain and destruction. Like a flash of lightning on a dark night, so laughter or ridicule illuminates the dark abyss of the human spirit and awakens the soul to the active light of day.

When two people look alike we may smile. We smile because we regard one as an imitation of the other. The situation is ludicrous because we are in a state of perplexity, since we regard each one as an imitation of the other, we do not know which is the original and which is the mimicking imitation. I have, however, inquired of a number of people, and I find that it is not so much the likeness of the individuals that is laughed at as the misunderstanding to which the close resemblance gives rise. Twins are laughed at only when we are apt to confuse them and have misapprehensions of an absurd character which are on that account ludicrous. Shakespeare, in his “Comedy of Errors,” represents a couple of twins with complicated absurd situations in which one of the twins is taken for the other, with ludicrous results, because of the confusion and misunderstanding of their actions and misinterpretation of what the twins say and do. After a series of misunderstandings the double set of twins are confronted before *Adriana* and the duke, who exclaim in amazement:

Adr. I see two husbands, or mine eyes deceive me.

Duke. One of these men is Genius to the other;

And so of these. Which is the natural man,
And which the spirit? who deciphers them?

In the comedy of “Twelfth Night” Shakespeare resorts to a similar plot in which *Sebastian* and his sister

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Viola are made to look alike. Out of such an ambiguous situation the poet weaves a net of misunderstandings. When the plot comes to a solution and the two are confronted Shakespeare makes the lookers-on exclaim:

Duke. One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons,
A natural perspective, that is and is not!

Seb. Antonio, O my dear Antonio!
How have the hours rack'd and tortured me,
Since I have lost thee!

Ant. Sebastian are you?

Mark the fact that when the twins are confronted there is no laughter at their close resemblance, but there is present a state of astonishment with nothing of the ludicrous in it. The ludicrous arises out of the ambiguity of situations, out of the play of misapprehensions, false vexations, trivial troubles, various forms of foolings which amuse and delight the audience. We laugh at the way people are, intentionally or unintentionally, *mised* and *fooled* by imitations.

Imitation, imitativeness, or mimicry is laughed at because it indicates lack of intelligence, either of the original or of the copy. In imitativeness, in mimicry we laugh at lack of brains. The essence of the ludicrous in mimicry may be summarized by the following fable:

A fox entered the house of an actor and, rummaging through all his properties, came upon a Mask, an admirable imitation of a human head. He placed his paws on it, and said, "What a beautiful head! yet it is of no value, *as it entirely wants brains.*"

The cunning fox and the brainless Mask are well contrasted. The human head, however fair, is made ludicrous through lack of brains.

CHAPTER XXV

LOGIC AND RIDICULE

Many of the jokes and comic phrases we meet are logical in character, and as such may be considered as verbal or material fallacies. Thus the pun, which is commonly regarded as a joke or a witty remark, falls under the class known as *fallacy of equivocation*. The same word has an homonymous meaning with something which is quite different and contrasting to what the speaker intends to say, the inferior being brought into play under the covered meaning of the superior.

Take, for instance, the example of the theatrical manager who, on being complimented on the excellent voice of his prima donna, replied: "Yes, but she has a long bill." The equivocation turns on the association of contrasting images as a *bill* of a bird with a *bill* for money.

"Can she paint?"

"Yes, she uses paint daily."

A linguist was asked how many modern tongues he had mastered.

"All, except that of my wife and of my mother-in-law."

A sailor after having been fished out from the water was asked by a sentimental lady how he *felt* in the water.

"*Wet*," the sailor replied.

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An Irishman was listening to two young school teachers. One said she had thirty children, the other said she had forty children to attend to.

"Excuse me," asked the Irishman, "do your husbands come from the old country?"

"Why can't you be good?" asked a mother of her small boy.

"I'll be good for a nickel," he said.

"Ah," admonished the mother. "You should copy your father, and be good for nothing."

In all these examples we have an equivocal meaning of words with a suggestion of the relation of inferiority. The speaker by a word or a phrase suggests the reverse of what he intends to say, or the meaning of the phrase is differently interpreted by the listener or interlocutor.

Take another example where the joke turns on pure equivocation of words:

"This is Mike Gun," said the police officer. "The Gun is loaded."

In the morning the captain turned to the prisoner: "Gun, you are discharged and the report will be in the papers to-morrow."

A physician turned dairyman. When asked the reason for it, the physician replied that he found there was more money in the "well" than in the sick.

One wondered there were so many pickpockets about London, seeing there was a watch at every corner.

"Bah!" was the reply, "they would as willingly meet with a *watch* as with anything else."

In all these examples we find the play on words of equivocal meaning, with a distant suggestion of associa-

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tions of inferiority, such as the drunkard Gun and the firearms, the physician, dairyman, and the well, the pickpocket and the watch he picks.

"We have a hen," said a boy boastingly, "that lays an egg for me every week."

"My grandfather," replied his chum, "is a bishop, and every week he lays a foundation stone."

The doctor said, "I must throw up everything and take a sea voyage."—Got the cart before the horse.

An Irishman saw while passing through a graveyard the following words written on a tombstone: "I still live." Pat looked a moment, and then said: "Be jabbers, if I was dead, I'd own up to it."

"He was driven to his grave!"

"Sure he was. Did you expect him to walk there?"

In all these various examples of jokes we find that the word which is played upon is one that has various meanings and the suggestion is toward the inferior, while the word is apparently used in the sense of superiority, or one of the *dramatis personæ* is made to look sheepish by a play on a word. The solemn and the sad are contrasted with the flippancy and the gay, the intelligent with the stupid. The word is taken out of its setting, dissociated from the set of systems into which it fits and acquires its meaning, and is associated with another set with which it is incongruous, thus giving rise to the ludicrous on account of the lack of meaning and association of inferiority. The senseless, the meaningless is ridiculous because it expresses stupidity, inferiority of thought.

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The fallacy known in logic as the fallacy of equivocation is often utilized to express mental inferiority, moral and intellectual. The pun is much used in the jocose and the comic:

"How does the noted healer, who cures his patients by touching them, differ from the regular physician?"

"Why he touches them before he cures them."

Two doctors met in the hall of the hospital.

"Well," said the first, "what is new this morning?"

"I've got a most curious case. Woman cross-eyed; in fact so cross-eyed that when she cries the tears run down her back."

"What are you treating her for?"

"Just now," was the reply, "we are treating her for bacteria."

A young American lady attended a banquet of physicians in London. She was decidedly good to look at, and the gentleman on one side, glancing at her, remarked to her escort: "By George, we have a duck between us."

She retorted: "Why, because I am between two quacks?"

In all these jokes or puns the ludicrous depends on the meaning of the word with the suggestion of a state of inferiority, disclosing an incongruity of concepts, a plausible absurdity. *Cross-eyedness*, *tears running down the back*, *bacteria*. *Touching* in the sense of *healing* and *touching* in the sense of *stealing*. *Duck* a good thing, *duck* a bird and, hence, the further suggestion of ganders and *quacks* used in the meaning of *fakes*.

We may take occasion to point out that the joke attains its end, not only by dissociating the word from its moorings, so to say, but often accomplishing its pur-

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pose by dissociating the word itself; such, for instance, is the case in the joke on *back-teria*. Other examples may be adduced proving the same point:

The "Legend of the Cid" was set up by a printer as "The Leg End of the Kid."

The joke or the comic may again be constructed on the equivocal meaning of the sentence, such as the invitation to an acquaintance:

"If, sir, you ever come within a mile of my house, I hope you will stay there."

Reports had come to the president of a well known Eastern college that one of the students was drinking more than was good for him. Meeting the student on the campus one morning, the president stopped him by the question:

"Young man, do you drink?"

"Well, why?" the student hesitated, "not so early in the morning."

A farmer being sick, he and his wife came to a doctor for examination and advice. The doctor after the examination turned to the farmer and said: "My dear man, you must drink asses' milk. If you cannot obtain asses' milk come to me and I'll help you to some."

When the couple left the office, the wife turned to the farmer:

"Does the doctor give suck?"

This is known in logic as the fallacy of *amphibology*, and often gives rise to comic sayings and ludicrous situations.

"Why do you keep the pigs in the house?" Pat was asked.

"Ain't it a good place for pigs?" was the reply.

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A nurse had been called as a witness to prove the correctness of the bill of a physician.

"Let us get at the facts in the case," said the lawyer who was doing a cross-examining stunt. "Didn't the doctor make several visits after the patient was out of danger?"

"No, sir," answered the nurse, "I considered the patient in danger as long as the doctor continued his visits."

Any combination of opposite, contradictory ideas and images is apt to give rise to laughter. Thus Mr. Hanna during his change of personality had to learn things over again. He saw a chicken and he was told it was a black chicken. Next time he saw a white chicken he called it a *white-black chicken*. At which the people laughed. Such incongruous remarks are often made by children.

A young lady said of a book that it was so dry that she had to wade through it.

A Bostonian lady asked a village grocer if he kept Browning.

"No," he answered, "I only keep blacking."

A business man given to bankrupting asked his newly married daughter if she was happy.

"You know, father, marriage is a failure."

"Then," replied the father, "your marriage is a success."

An Irish cavalryman was found by his officer dismounted from the horse.

"Did you have orders from headquarters?"

"No, from hindquarters."

Sometimes the accent or intonation, emphasis, of the word in the sentence are apt to give rise to equivocal meaning with a disadvantage and derogation of one of

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the speakers, and the result is ludicrous. Such, for instance, is the verse in the Bible :

And he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me the ass.
And they saddled *him*.

Maggie, I do not want that big policeman in the kitchen.
All right, mum, I shall have the *little* one.

There are the fallacies of arguing from a general rule to a special case, or conversely from a special case to a general rule, what is known *a dicto secundum quid ad dictum simpliciter*; or again arguing from a special case to another special case. The fallacy of irrelevant conclusion, or what is known in logic as *Ignoratio Elenci*, is a common source of the comic and the ludicrous.

"I have a convincing argument for woman suffrage," exclaimed a gentleman. "Are not all human beings equal? Then women should vote."

The captain of a merchant vessel gave an Irish seaman his spy glass, of which he was very proud, and told him to clean it carefully. Pat met with an accident during the cleaning, and went to the captain, asking:

"Captain, will yez tell me if a thing can be said to be lost whin one knows where it is?"

"Lost when one knows where it is?" said the captain.
"Why of course not. How foolish you are, Pat."

"Well sor," said Pat, "thin yer spyglass is safe, for it's at the bottom of the sea."

An attorney for the defendant in a lawsuit is said to have handed to the barrister his brief marked: "No case, abuse the plaintiff's attorney."

A slip of memory from the general to the special, or

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from the special to the general may often give rise to laughter. A Miss Pigeon is misnamed Miss Bird, a Miss Creek, by association of ideas with the creak of a door, is addressed as Miss Hinge.

The fallacy known as *Petitio Principii*, or begging the question, or *circulus in probando*, is often a source of the ludicrous, as in the case of the Irish announcement, "vehicles must carry light in the darkness. Darkness begins when the lights are lit."

In the same way the rest of the logical fallacies are found in the comic, such as the fallacy of *non sequitur*, that of false cause, the fallacy known as *non causa pro causa*, and the well-known fallacy described by the phrase *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, the fallacy of many questions as well as the fallacy of dubious and many different meanings, are all employed in the comic and the ludicrous.

All the different forms of fallacies may be employed in the comic. The characters may directly and naïvely show their mental and moral deficiency; or the mental turpitude may be revealed by one of the characters making some remarks to turn the saying or the action to the disadvantage of the person ridiculed. The joke may take the form of a fallacy or absurdity or some distant, vague, partly obscure, and still evident enough suggestion of mental and moral inferiority.

A judge said to an advocate: "Do you see anything ridiculous in the wig?"

"Nothing but the head."

A lawyer was once addressing a jury, when the judge, who was thought to be antagonistic to his client, intimated his dissent from the arguments advanced by shaking his head.

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"I see, gentlemen," said the lawyer, "the motion of his Honor's head. Persons unacquainted with him would be apt to think that this implied a difference of opinion; but be assured, gentlemen, this is not the case. When you know his Honor as well as I do, it will be unnecessary to tell you that when he shakes his head there is really nothing in it."

A rich contractor was discussing the instability of the world. "Can you account for it?" he asked.

"Well, not very clearly," was the response, "unless we suppose it was built by contract."

In the first two examples the fallacy was pointed out that the ridiculous was not in the wig, not in the shaking of the head, but in the head of the judge, in his stupidity. In the second the fallacy of the instability of the world was referred to the bad work done by contract.

"Why are you humming that air?"

"Because it haunts me."

"No wonder," was the rejoinder, "you are murdering it."

The gentleman intimated he was musical and that is why he was haunted by airs. The rejoinder pointed out the false cause, the real cause was the murdering of the music—that the gentleman was really devoid of all musical abilities.

There is again the joke or the comic made by the process of converse reasoning. The statement is refuted by a converse statement in which the folly of the first statement stands out clear and distinct.

The Chancellor D'Aguesseau, with all his intellect and learning, was very irresolute; his son, who was very rapid

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in his decisions, said to him one day: "Father, you know everything, and never decide upon anything."

"My son," retorted the Chancellor, "you know nothing and decide always upon everything."

A Scotchman put an Irishman in kilts and told Pat:

"Do not be afraid, you will not be cold with the kilts."

"Yes, but I may be kilt with the cold."

It was reported to Sheridan that the critic, Cumberland, had said of a performance of "The School for Scandal" that he was surprised that the audience laughed at it so immoderately, as it did not make him smile.

"Cumberland is truly ungrateful," said Sheridan, "for not smiling at my comedy; for I saw a tragedy of his a fortnight before at the Covent Garden, and laughed from the beginning to the end."

In the examples adduced we have a converse process of reasoning with a slight modification and emphasis on a central concept which throws the train of thought in a different line, in the opposite direction. The assaulted party turns the table on assailants and puts them to flight. In other words, the relation of inferiority is thrown back and reversed. The stream of thought runs in one direction and then suddenly, by a sleight of hand, so to say, by a swift turn, is made to flow in the opposite direction.

As an example of *petitio principii*, or of begging the question, we may take the anecdote:

"Where do you live, Pat?"

"With Mike."

"Where does Mike live?"

"With me."

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"But where do you and Mike live?"

"Together."

As an example of *non sequitur* may be taken the problem:

The ship is 150 feet long, 25 feet deep and 20 feet wide, how old is the captain's wife?

This may be matched by the statement of the Irish beggar:

"Give me something to eat; I am so thirsty that I do not know where I am going to sleep to-night."

Another statement is of the same type and no less ludicrous:

The American Indians have such sharp eyesight that they can hear the tramp of a horse at a great distance.

As an example of *non causa pro causa* may be taken the following from Lucian:

A fool was bitten by many fleas. He put out the light and said, "Now you no longer see me."

The fallacy of many questions may be illustrated by the following example:

A juvenile judge asked a delinquent boy: "Was your father in a state of intoxication when your mother hit him with a rolling pin?"

Two different questions are here rolled into one. The answer "Yes," as well as the answer "No," would still imply the affirmation of at least one of the statements.

As another example in which the inappropriate cause,

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inferiority, and stupidity of the actors stand out clearly may be taken the following anecdote :

A lady was bragging that she had overthrown her enemy in a lawsuit. One of her servants, standing by, said he took a wrong sow by the ear, when he meddled with her ladyship.

CHAPTER XXVI

NONSENSE AND RIDICULE

Ordinary nonsense verses or sayings such as Irish bulls are apt to afford us the pleasure of laughter, like any absurdity which we can readily discover and regard as a relation of inferiority in respect to our intellectual activity. We are amused at the nonsense verses of "Alice in Wonderland," or even at the still more nonsensical verses of "Mother Goose." This is not due to the fact, as some imagine, of removal of inhibitions and ease of thought, but it is solely due to the relation of superiority and inferiority as well as to the satisfaction with ourselves and our mental resources which those absurdities and nonsense statements set into action. In short, the laughter in such cases is not due to diminution of activity and saving of mental energy, but, on the contrary, to the sense of increase and free expenditure of mental activity.

The feeling of presence of sources of reserve energy, the sense of buoyancy, of mental activity, the upheaval of inner, latent energies raised from the conscious and the subconscious regions by associations of the relation of inferiority—all these conditions constitute the essence of the funny, the ludicrous, and the comic. It is not the saving, not the economizing of energy; but, quite the contrary, it is the reckless expenditure, the

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expansion of inner forces, the revelation of untold wealth, which can be carelessly thrown away at our pleasure, disclosed to our superior view by things and relations of an inferior character, it is that alone that gives rise to the mirth and merriment of the laughter, of the comic and the ludicrous. The laughter of the comic and the ludicrous is like the joy of viewing lowlands, valleys, ravines, and lower peaks from the height of some overtowering mountain top. The enjoyment does not consist so much in the fact that we ourselves feel bigger, as that we have the sensation of standing on higher ground. It is not we, it is the mountain and its scenery that are grand. Such sensations of grandeur, added to the feeling of our inner powers, are given to us subconsciously in laughter. *In nonsense we experience the strength of our sense.*

Nonsense is often employed to bring out the inner absurdity of some saying or of some real relation in life or of some of the institutions which are regarded as holy and inviolable. The moral poems which children are made to memorize by rote in school are well ridiculed by the nonsense verses which *Alice* is made to repeat before the *Caterpillar*:

“You are old, Father William,” the young man said,

“And your hair has become very white;

And yet you incessantly stand on your head—

Do you think at your age it is right?”

“In my youth,” Father William replied to his son,

“I feared it might injure my brain;

But now I am perfectly sure I have none,

Why, I do it again and again.”

At the same time in his frolicsome merriment and

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under the cloak of nonsense the writer manages to throw out a hint as to marital relations and family happiness:

"You are old," said the youth, "and your jaws are too weak
For anything tougher than suet;
Yet you finished the goose with the bones and the beak;
Pray, how did you manage to do it?"
"In my youth," said his father, "I took to the law
And argued each case with my wife;
And the muscular strength which it gave to my jaw,
Has lasted the rest of my life."

Take again the nonsense verses repeated as school lessons before the *Gryphon* and the *Mock Turtle*:

'Tis the voice of the lobster; I heard him declare,
You have baked me too brown, I must sugar my hair.
As a duck with its eyelids, so he with his nose
Trims his belt and his buttons, and turns out his toes.

"That is different from what I used to say when I was a child," said the Gryphon.

"Well I never heard it before," said the Mock Turtle;
"but it sounds uncommon nonsense."

Take the parody on the silly verses, "Mary had a Little Lamb":

Mary had a little lamb,
Likewise a lobster stew,
And ere the sunlit morning dawned
She had a nightmare, too.

We may take another version:

Mary had a little lamp,
Filled with benzoline;
Tried to light it at the fire,
Has not since benzine.

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To quote from "Mother Goose":

Three wise men of Gotham
Went to sea in a bowl;
If the bowl had been stronger,
My song had been longer.

The nonsense of "Alice Through the Looking Glass" is specially instructive:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

.
"When you say 'hill,'" the Queen interrupted, "I could show you hills, in comparison with which you'd call that a valley."

"No, I shouldn't," said Alice, surprised into contradicting her at last; "a hill can't be a valley, you know. That would be nonsense."

.
"It's only the Red King snoring," said Tweedledee.

"Come and look at him!" the brothers cried, and they each took one of Alice's hands, and led her up to where the king was sleeping.

"Isn't he a lovely sight?" said Tweedledum.

Alice couldn't say honestly that he was. He had a tall red night-cap on, with a tassel, and he was lying crumpled up into a sort of untidy heap, and snoring loud, "fit to snore his head off!" as Tweedledum remarked.

"I'm afraid he'll catch cold with lying on the damp grass," said Alice, who was a very thoughtful little girl.

"He's dreaming now," said Tweedledee; "and what do you think he's dreaming about?"

Alice said, "Nobody can guess that."

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"Why, about you!" Tweedledee exclaimed, clapping his hands triumphantly. "And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?"

"Where I am now, of course," said Alice.

"Not you!" Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. "You'd be nowhere. Why you're only a sort of thing in his dream!"

"If that there King was to wake," added Tweedledum, "you'd go out—bang!—just like a candle!"

.

"What sort of things do you remember best?" Alice ventured to ask.

"Oh, things that happened the week after next," the Queen replied in a careless tone.

"For instance, now," she went on, sticking a large piece of plaster on her finger as she spoke, "there's the King's Messenger. He's in prison now being punished; and the trial doesn't even begin till next Wednesday; and of course the crime comes last of all."

"Suppose he never commits the crime?" said Alice.

"That would be all the better, wouldn't it?" the Queen said.

Humpty Dumpty sings:

I sent a message to the fish;
I told them "This is what I wish."

The little fishes of the sea
They sent an answer back to me.

The little fishes' answer was,
"We cannot do it, Sir, because——"

In the nonsense of "Alice Through The Looking Glass" we find that the ludicrous side lies in the uncommon, unusual, absurd combination of words and ideas.

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The unusual, surprising aspect of it is pleasant, while the illogical, absurd, and nonsensical side with the tendency of revealing the inferior makes of it that specific kind of laughter which is characteristic of the comic and the ludicrous. The unusual aspect stimulates our activities, which are apt to run into a rut by the ordinary stimuli of life, and thus brings out our subconscious energies held in reserve by the environment which has no demand for them. Just as we crave for new sensations so do we crave for new aspects of life. Even the nonsensical is a source of enjoyment.

A form of verse adapted to a ludicrous subject and clothed in a clumsy, awkward, ludicrous expression with long and short feet may be found in the limerick. This form of versification well brings out our view of the ludicrous. The form consists of ill matched feet, while the subject and the climax, or rather the anti-climax, are trivial, low, and inferior. We find in the limerick the factor of suggestiveness present in the climax of the little poem with its sharp, unexpected, sudden turn, suggestive of the low, mean, ignoble, base, and disreputable.

A few examples will best answer our purpose:

There was a young man from the city,
Who saw what he thought was a kitty,
To make sure of that
He gave it a pat.
They buried his clothes—what a pity!

We have here the sudden turn of the subject in the climax from the purring pussy with the strong suggestion of the mean, fetid skunk.

Of a sudden the great prima-donna
Cried: "Heavens, my voice is a gonner!"

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But a cat in the wings
Cried, "I know how she sings."
And finished the solo with honor.

The ridicule here is in the juxtaposition of the prima-donna and the cat; with the suggestive climax that even at her best the prima-donna's voice is nothing but a discordant caterwauling so hideous to people.

There was a young man of Ostend
Who vowed he'd hold out to the end,
But when half way over
From Calais to Dover
He done what he didn't intend.

The vulgarity, the slang, and the suggestion in the climax of seasickness with its consequences of the inferior, referring to the uncontrollable side of man's lower organization and functions—all go to constitute the ludicrous in these limericks.

The inventor, he chortled with glee,
As they fished his airship from the sea,
"I shall build," and he laughed,
"A submarine craft,
And perhaps it will fly," remarked he.

Said the aeronaut in his balloon:
"I shall see all the stars very soon."
Soon he flopped and he dropped,
And he saw when he stopped,
Four millions of stars and a moon.

An inventor who once did aspire
To invent a remarkable flier,
When asked, "Does it go?"
Replied, "I don't know,
I wait for some d——n fool to try'er."

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All these limericks are directed against the inferiority of aeronautics.

The following limerick and its doggerel Latin version, though almost brutally vulgar, may be regarded as ludicrous on account of the implied suggestion of relation of inferiority:

There was a young lady of Riga
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger.
They returned from the ride
With the lady inside,
And the smile on the face of the tiger.

*Puella Rigensis ridebat
Quam tigris in tergo vehebat;
Externa profecta,
Interna revecta,
Sed risus cum tigre manebat.*

Solomon and David led very merry lives,
And had a most delightful time among their many wives,
But when at last their blood grew thin, they suffered many
qualms,
Then Sol, he wrote the Proverbs, and Dave, he wrote the
Psalms.

Here the sublime and the profane, the holy and the scurrilous are brought into association and awaken the sense of the ludicrous. Whenever and wherever we meet with veiled suggestions of relations of inferiority, whether physical, intellectual, or moral, there we find the sense of the ludicrous aroused to activity. The slipping of a person on the street accompanied with profane language may be a source of the ludicrous:

There was a young girl named O'Dell
Who while walking down Chestnut street fell,

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She got up with a bound,
And looked all around,
And said in a deep voice, "Oh, H—l!"

The dignity of the girl, the fall, the unguarded profanity after looking all around, strongly suggest relations of inferiority.

There are again limericks which in a jolly way point out the contrast between the assumed moral ideal of social life and actual practice :

There was a young lady from Kent,
Who always said just what she meant;
People said, "She's a dear;
So unique—so sincere,"
But they shunned her by common consent.

We may take another example which indicates relations of inferiority suggested to the reader :

There was a young fellow named S—m,
A foe to all pretense and Sh—m
His language was l—se
And he swore like the d—ce
When angry he always said d—m.

The limerick sometimes avails itself of alliteration to bring out the comic effect. Alliteration is an inferior form of versification, and this is utilized to bring out an inferior form of activity :

A tutor who tooted the flute
Tried to teach two young tooters to toot;
Said the two to the tutor;
"Is it harder to toot, or
To tutor two tooters to toot?"

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In "Much Ado About Nothing" Shakespeare makes the reader laugh at *Dogberry's* stupidity, nonsense, absurdity, and asininity.

Dog. Come hither, neighbor Seacole. God hath blessed you with a good name: to be a well-favored man is the gift of fortune; but to write and read comes by nature.

.

Conrade. Away! You are an ass, you are an ass.

Dog. . . . O that he were here to write me down an ass! But, masters, remember that I am an ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass.

Dogberry makes his report to *Don Pedro*:

D. Pedro. Officers, what offence have these men done?

Dog. Marry, sir, they have committed false report; moreover, they have spoken untruths; secondarily, they are slanders; sixth and lastly, they have belied a lady; thirdly, they have verified unjust things; and, to conclude, they are lying knaves.

In "The Merry Wives of Windsor" *Sir Hugh Evans*, the parson, sings his nonsense verses which make of him a melodramatic fool:

To shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals;
There will make me our peds of roses,
And a thousand fragrant posies.

To shallow—

Mercy on me! I have a great disposition to cry. (*Sings.*)

Melodious birds sing madrigals—

When as I sat in Pabylon—

And a thousand vagram posies.

To shallow, &c.

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Many different trains of thought, forming a tangle of associations thus ending in absurdity, folly and nonsense, disclosing relations of inferiority and states of stupidity, invariably awaken the sense of the ludicrous.

CHAPTER XXVII

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Any form of inferiority excites laughter. In the lower states of intellect, in the lower conditions of social life, or in barbaric communities we find that all forms of inferiority arouse derision and laughter. We find that some of the more ferocious types positively enjoy pains inflicted on their enemies. Enemies taken captives are tortured, while their cries arouse a feeling of glee in the bystanders. The same we find in the tortures inflicted on the heretics in the Middle Ages. The crowd enjoyed the spectacle of having a heretic burned alive, the day of an *auto-da-fe* was regarded as a festival. The writhing pains of the heretic were met with hilarious, uproarious laughter. Boys of the rougher type in torturing insects and defenceless animals laugh immoderately—the agonies of the animal are a matter of intense enjoyment to the youthful tormentors. Similarly the gladiatorial games of the ancient Romans and the bull fights of the modern Spaniards, the prize fights, boxing matches, and other games of the Anglo-Saxon races are all arranged with the view of appealing to the lower brutal instincts of man.

In the vulgar shows of our own times we find the lower instincts taking the upper hand. A man knocked down on the stage several times in succession, one poking his fingers into another man's eyes, one stepping on

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another man's corns, all such actions having the appearance of causing pain, of not a dangerous character and still seemingly serious to the one who is subjected to them, are greeted by some audiences with peals of laughter. The pain is regarded by the audience as slight and insignificant, although the abused person may regard the matter in a very different light. In fact, the more important the insignificant matter is considered by the person the more ridiculous the whole performance appears. In many societies pain is regarded as ludicrous, even if it is a matter of death, as in the case of the gladiatorial games of the ancient Romans. This was due not only to the brutality of the people used to such spectacles, but also to the fact that the lives of the gladiators were considered as worthless.

3 To laugh at the misfortunes of other people with whom we have no sympathy, or for whom we have no use and whom we treat with contempt and possibly with hatred, may be considered as one of the early roots of the comic and ludicrous. One laughs at the misfortunes of his enemies, the laughter is malicious, diabolical, and really belongs to the inimical sneer which is the direct descendant of the snarl of the brute. We may include under it the obscene and scurrilous joke which regards the object of ridicule with a sneer. The obscene joke has the tendency to awaken sexual energy and pamper the sexual instinct. This root of malice, however, becomes gradually atrophied and dwindles away in the higher spheres of comic art. At first the malicious side is hidden and then is completely omitted in the real productions of art. The malicious comic may be still utilized for the amusement of the mob, but it is not art. Detective stories and dime novels are not regarded as literary

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productions, although they may keep on amusing the crowd. *Play on malice, credulity, and low instincts is kept out of art.*

If we come to analyze the comic we find that its object is the awakening of the subconscious surplus energy of man, bringing to the foreground the play of free, unimpeded activity, giving rise to pure joy, resulting in laughter. Malice and cruelty belong to the primitive means of arousing man's reserve energy, just as war was useful in bringing men into communication, as cruel despotism was requisite to cement tribes, and as slavery had its place in the training of man. Such means, however, fall into disuse with the further advance of mankind.

The comic, which is a manifestation of the play instinct, follows a similar course. The factor of cruelty is no longer the one that arouses mirth among civilized people, or, at least, among the best classes of civilized races. In fact, we find that the element of malice must be hidden, and the element of inflicted pain must be of a character that should be slight, insignificant, and only *apparently serious*. Furthermore, the demand is that the ridicule should be directed against something which is *really inferior* and demands suppression in the mild way caused by laughter.

In the still higher forms of ridicule the malicious is not only eliminated, but sympathy is present with the inferior object or relations ridiculed. *This is the form known as humor*. Dickens ridicules a number of characters, but we see through his ridicule his humaneness and love for human life; we love and sympathize with the people whom we regard as ludicrous.

The same we find in the genial humor of Bret Harte

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and of Mark Twain, writers who otherwise lack the artistic sense. Thus, for instance, in "Huckleberry Finn," the negro *Jim* is put in a ridiculous light with all the beliefs and superstitions which he entertains and which he tries to impress on his companion. *Finn*. At the same time we feel the common humanity we share with the poor negro. We cannot help loving and sympathizing with poor *Jim* in spite of all his failings and shortcomings. We laugh at *Jim*, but there is human feeling in the laughter as we feel intensely our community with him.

The laughter in such ridicule acts in that way of catharsis as described by Aristotle in the case of tragedies—it purifies us and establishes our common humanity, full of defects and imperfections, revealing that divine spark which burns in every human being in spite of the ashes which cover the flames, hide the fire, and seemingly smother it. We forgive and we sympathize, for we see a living soul, the beauty of the spirit behind the ugly, dirty tatters, and the black skin. The characters may be laughed at, but we cannot help loving them.

Dickens' characters may be commonplace people, but we feel the good heart that beats under their unattractive exterior, and we come to love them. Such, for instance, are the characters *Barkis* and *Pegotty*, in "David Copperfield." We laugh away our indignation, narrowness, and prejudices. As in all art, the bonds of individuality are burst asunder and the artist, by means of his humor, brings people together. Souls are stripped of their conventionalities by ridicule and come into close contact.

Our life runs on worn-out paths laid in the ruts of social tradition; our experiences are run into ready-made

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moulds of pale abstract concepts; our feelings, emotions, cravings and longings are controlled by tradition and custom, handed down by former generations, as well as by habits developed in the course of the routine education of the individual. We are apt to fall into a routine and cease to appreciate the main, central, essential aspects of life. We attend to our individual experiences, as they come along, without the realization of their general meaning and significance. In the routine of our life, and in the tangle of our experiences, we are apt to go by the practical rule of thumb, and cease to appreciate the really important; we cease to discriminate the essential from the inessential. The power of selection and the sense of appreciation of the important and unimportant, of the significant and insignificant, being feeble, undeveloped or rudimentary in the average specimen of humanity, man wanders about like a lost sheep in the wild confusion of his chaotic experiences. The best that man can do is to seize on each bit of individual experience, as it forces itself on him, but he cannot grasp the many experiences as a whole, see them in perspective, and view them in their various aspects.

The function of art is the selection by the artist of the important, essential, significant traits of life and the weaving of them into creations of universal types. The types are ideal and still they are real, inasmuch as they give meaning and significance to the confused and chaotic individual experiences of our daily life. The artist, by his creative genius, gives us the perspective of things: he makes us appreciate the various aspects of life, which he reveals to our gaze by finding their ideal meaning, their real significance in the ceaseless flux of our life; he gives us the interpretation of the various aspects of life,

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as seen by the eagle eye of his artistic genius. This the artist accomplishes by presenting the typical, the ideal, the universal in concrete, individualized forms of sensuous experience.

Out of the chaos and confusion of experience the artist selects the essential; out of the fleeting and transitory he selects the permanent, the abiding, the characteristic features, creating them into living types, into immortal characters. The artist universalizes the individual and individualizes the universal; he embodies the ideal into a living type. Phidias creates his Zeus, Raphael his Madonna, Homer creates his Achilles, Hector and Ulysses, Æschylus breathes life into his Prometheus, Sophocles creates his Antigone, Euripides his Alcestis, Cervantes his Don Quixote, Shakespeare his Hamlet and Goethe his Faust.

Dramatic genius expresses itself in tragedy and comedy the function of which is the creation of types and the revelation of the real, inner, deeper nature of man. Tragedy reveals the nature of types of man through inner struggle and suffering, while comedy gives a glimpse into the depths of types of man's life by contrast of defects of the actual with the ideal through laughter and joy. Both tragedy and comedy, in the better and higher sense, confront man with his real self.

In the higher forms of art comedy and tragedy may merge. It is hard to tell whether or no Euripides' "Alcestis," Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice," Lessing's "Nathan the Wise," Gogol's "Dead Souls" belong to tragedy or to comedy. Dante's "Inferno" is entitled "Divine Comedy."

In his "Dead Souls," Gogol complains of the unjust

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judgment which does not recognize the fact that creations of "elevated laughter stand on the same plane with the creations of elevated lyrical emotions." He further tells us: "I have been condemned by some strange power to go hand in hand with my heroes (types), to view life, as it sweeps pompously by, through the seeming world of laughter and tears." Tragedy and comedy, in fact, all the higher forms of art, free man from the bonds of his finite individuality, and, through laughter and tears, reveal to him by immediate intuition the infinity, the freedom of his better, deeper, larger self.

Banter and badinage are akin to humor. The person is humiliated and laughed at, but only in play. In reality it is the reverse that is meant. Affection and love are expressed in terms drawn from the inferior and humbler side of life. What is meant is the opposite, it is based on association of contrast. In the same way a big man is called an infant, or white is indicated as black, sweet as sour, good as bad, and love is playfully regarded as hatred. This play and playful spirit often come from a deep source of love. In this respect it is akin to the kiss, the smacking and the licking which express affection and which, by the law of association of similars, are originated in food reactions and afterward transferred to other sources to express satisfaction, gratification, and love.

In some cases the excitement may run so high as to be manifested by a sham bite and even by an actual strong bite causing pain. Banter and badinage are in the intellectual world of laughter what the kiss and the bite are in the material world. In banter and badinage there are love, faith, and devotion, but they are all covered by a thin veil of smiles, laughter, ridicule, and

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raillery. The superior is expressed in terms of the inferior.

In this respect we may regard it as the reverse of irony, in which the inferior is played as if it were the superior. Irony is allied to sarcasm. Both show lack of trust in the powers of the ridiculed object. Banter and badinage are more allied to satire, in which, though pessimistic and attacking faults and defects, still there is faith in the deeper forms of life and the possibility of regeneration. The satirist ridicules the faults and shortcomings of persons and life, he expects improvements and hopes that a new higher type will take the place of the old degenerated forms.

We may call the reader's attention to a little-known Christmas story, entitled "*Makar's Dream*," by Korolenko. The writer draws a vivid picture of *Makar's* life, of his family relations, of his beastly drunkenness. The picture is full of grim humor. *Makar*, in his besotted state, the result of heavy drinking in honor of Christmas holiday, dreams that he has departed this life and has gone to heaven before the seat of judgment. The journey presents many ludicrous incidents. Poor, ignorant, superstitious *Makar* is helpless and bewildered in the heavenly court-house. The sins and merits are weighed on scales; the sins are too heavy. As usual *Makar* attempts to lie and cheat and is caught in the act. The charges against him are too grave. As the loving glance of Christ falls on *Makar*, the fear disappears, confidence and courage rise in the poor sinner's soul. Righteous indignation arises in him against the accusations of his cheerless life. He recalls his whole life—down to the smallest detail, it was indeed a miserable and brutal life. As he goes back to his early childhood he sees himself

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with all the possibilities of a good human soul. He witnesses the state of degradation in which he has fallen, and a cry of intense pain rends his agonized soul.

In "The Death of Ivan Ilitch," Tolstoy, the greatest of Russian writers, depicts with spirit and humor the artificial life of the modern successful man. He ridicules the pettiness, the narrowness, the conventionality, the hypocrisy, the aimlessness of such a hollow life. From the artificial social standpoint the life of the successful man is good and superior; in reality, it is inferior, bad and miserable. Guided by the false social standards, the successful man does not realize whither he drifts. The whole career is described by Tolstoy with all the artistic power in his possession. Tolstoy pours out the vials of his righteous ridicule in his humorous descriptions of the hypocrisy that permeates the life of the wealthy classes with their affected standards of sham goodness and counterfeit happiness. *Ivan Ilitch* falls sick. The disease becomes painful and aggravated. Physician after physician is consulted, and new treatments are undertaken. Tolstoy takes the occasion to describe in a humorous light the character of the physician, the lawyer, the judge, and of the professional man in general. He shows the hypocrisy, the vanity, the conceit of the various professions. The disease gains ground, develops, becomes fatal. *Ivan Ilitch* becomes obsessed with the fear of death. With the inimitable vigor characteristic of Tolstoy, he sketches in bold, artistic outlines this state of obsession which finds its victims among the higher classes of society. As the end draws nigh, *Ivan Ilitch* begins to realize that his life has not been a success, that it has been a rank failure; in fact, it was all an immense lie. A cry of

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agony arises from the inmost depths of his soul. As the sham of life vanishes the fear and pain suddenly disappear. In freeing himself from the bonds of his artificial life a great light and joy have entered into his soul. He has regained his real, true self.

In one of his stories, "Three Deaths," Tolstoy describes, with the titanic power of his genius, the life, sickness, and death of a wealthy lady. He shows the pettiness of that life, the hypocrisy, the discontent, the irritability, the credulity, the fear of death with which the wealthy classes are smitten. In a few lines of genius he depicts the life and end of a poor driver. There is a grim humor in the picture of the simple people—the lack of self-consciousness, the rough, natural kindness, the brutal frankness, the ignorance, the superstitions, the absence of morbid fears, the almost total resignation to the course of their life. The short scenes are full of the most delicate, the most artistic touches of humor. With a few strokes of genius the artist scales the heights of the human spirit, and throws a beam of light into the inmost depths of human nature. The story is concluded by a wonderful description of a scene in the forest, a requiem by the forest over the departure of a tree, a pæan by nature triumphing over death, a symphony of joy of newly rising life.

In the highest forms of humor the gentle smile and rippling laughter may end with an agonizing cry coming from the inmost depths of the human soul. The ludicrous, the humorous, is the play of mental light and shade on the foamy, restless waves, rolling and swaying above the unknown depth of the human spirit.

We may say that the highest form of humor is akin

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to that upbraiding and finding of faults characteristic of the ancient prophets. The shortcomings are pointed out bluntly and with intense fervor, but behind the reproofs, condemnations, and denunciations there is seen to be flaming an intense love for man, there is present an almost superhuman faith in the capabilities of human nature. The allusions and suggestiveness of humor are absent, but there is present an intense love of truth and of the ideal as well as a profound love of man. Listen to the invective against the waywardness of his generation by the prophet Hosea:

O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? . . .

The iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria; for they commit falsehood; and the thief cometh in, *and* the troop of robbers spoileth without. . . . Ephraim is a cake not turned. . . . Ephraim also is like a silly dove. . . . Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me.

Israel is an empty vine. . . . O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah. . . . Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies. . . . Therefore shall a tumult arise among the people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled. . . .

The prophet's love becomes awakened:

When Israel *was* a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. . . . I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. . . . I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love. . . . How shall I give thee up Ephraim? *How* shall I deliver thee, Israel? . . . Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled

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together. . . . I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I *am* God, and not man. . . .

In this we find infinite love, sympathy, pity, and compassion.

There is an element in the higher forms of the ludicrous which broadens and deepens it to an extent to which the lower forms do not aspire. While in the lower forms the inferior aspect is totally on the side of the ridiculed object, whether it be person, idea, feeling, institution, or belief, in the higher forms there is a reflection of inferiority on the person who observes the ludicrous, and there is again a reflection of superiority from the observer to the ridiculed object. Thus there is a mutual sympathy established between the contrasted personal states, as well as a communion between the opposed relations of inferiority and superiority. The lower forms tend to bring out the inner latent energies of the observer, the higher forms tend to show the depth of human life and the greatness of soul of the very characters represented to us in a ludicrous light. The glimpse into the infinity of the human soul is given to us under the very forms of defects and shortcomings. The lower forms of ridicule lean more to the inferior, the animal, the brutal, the cruel, and the pessimistic, while the higher forms have the distinct aspect of human love, compassion, and pity.

On the one hand, the observer, far from feeling triumphant, arrogant, and superior in regard to the ridiculed object or subject, feels his affinity with the inferior responding with a deep emotion of humility that one is not better than the most humble and the lowest

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of human life. On the other hand, there opens before one an infinite horizon of what is really true and noble in the human soul. Under the veil of petty, ludicrous traits and incidents we witness the revelation of the depth of human life and of the splendor of the soul present in what is humble, meek, and low. The great are humbled and the low are exalted. Both, however, are surrounded by a glorious halo of what is truly great in man. All the barriers of artificiality and conventionality of social relationship are broken and the human soul shines forth in its full glory.

The highest point reached by laughter is intimately related with the highest intellectual, æsthetic, and moral development.

The highest development of ridicule, true humor, brings one in touch with the infinite. True humor in its highest stages sees the infinite depth of the soul in the very failures, faults, defects, and imperfections.

For thence—a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks,—
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me. . . .
.

Now, who shall arbitrate?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me: we all surmise,
They, this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?

Not on the vulgar mass
Called "work," must sentence pass,

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LAUGHTER

Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's
amount:

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

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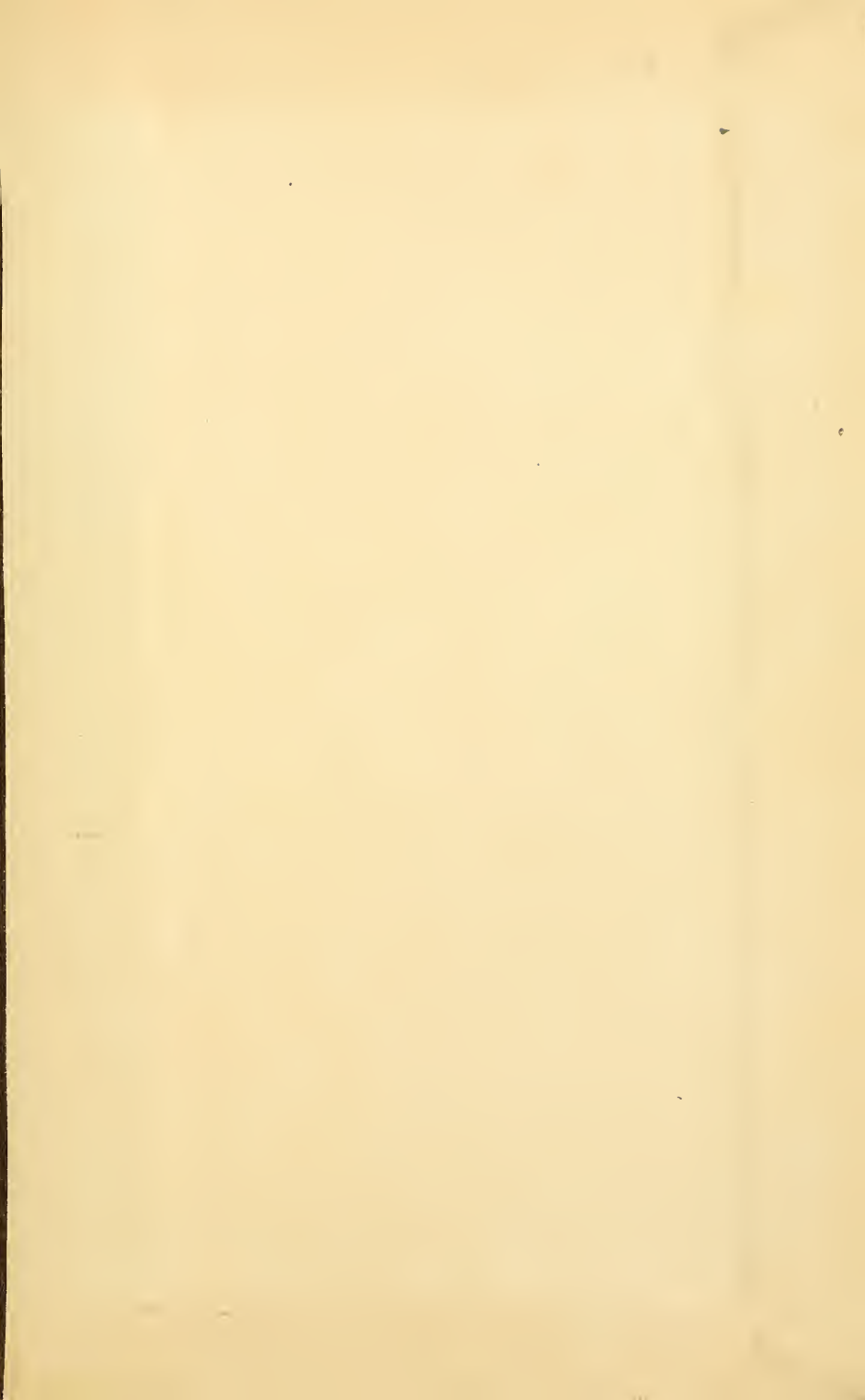


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